BEHIND THE WHEEL WORKOUTS --

As much as we are in our vehicles today, why not do something besides just sit and wait for traffic to clear, our kids to finish their game/practice, or studying at the library.

Remember, distractions are a major cause of vehicle crashes and you should be stopped or sitting in park somewhere – don't exercise when the vehicle is actually moving!

When you find yourself with a few minutes to spare, put the vehicle in park and get started. While the parking brake is engaged, taking a few minutes for light strengthening will provide needed stress relief and increase your overall energy.

Realignment

Begin with a healthy driving posture. Sit up straight and tall in the driver's seat and adjust your rear and side view mirrors. Later on, if you find as you are driving that you can't see out the mirrors, it's a good cue that you are beginning to slouch – adjust your posture, not the mirrors.

Rubber-necking

People tend to jut their heads forward as they drive, causing tension in your neck, upper back, and shoulders. To loosen those muscles, bend your head down and slightly to the right. With your right hand on the top of your head, gently pull down to assist with the stretch. Not too hard though, you want to hold a comfortable, not painful, stretch. Hold for 30 to 60 seconds then repeat on the left.

Floor it!

To tone your lower legs, place your feet flat on the floor and lift your heels until you are on your toes and feel a tensing in your calf muscles. Repeat five to eight times – holding in position for two to four seconds.

On the Shoulder

Lift your shoulders straight up then roll them back and down. Kind of like drawing a half circle with your shoulders. Hold the bottom position with your shoulders pulled as far away from the ears as you can. Hold for two to three seconds. Do six times with both shoulders – then repeat six times for each shoulder.

These simple exercises are not intended to replace a total workout. But they can help.

Power Steering

This routine is helpful in relieving tension in your forearms. Place fingers around steering wheel and squeeze tightly for a second or two. Then -- as quickly as possible -- release your fingers and hold you hands wide open. Repeat, but this time release your fingers one at a time. Do these movements two or three times.

Road Prayer

Place hands together as if praying and extend your elbows out to your side. Press hands firmly together and move your hands back and forth in front of you 10 times. This works your upper shoulders and back.

BackUp

Grip the steering wheel with both hands – pull your shoulder blades together while holding and without moving your arms. It feels like you are pulling the wheel closer to you. Gently arch your back while lifting your rib cage. Hold for five seconds and repeat six times.

This information is adapted from Better Homes and Garden Magazine, August 2005.