

take a **POSTURE**

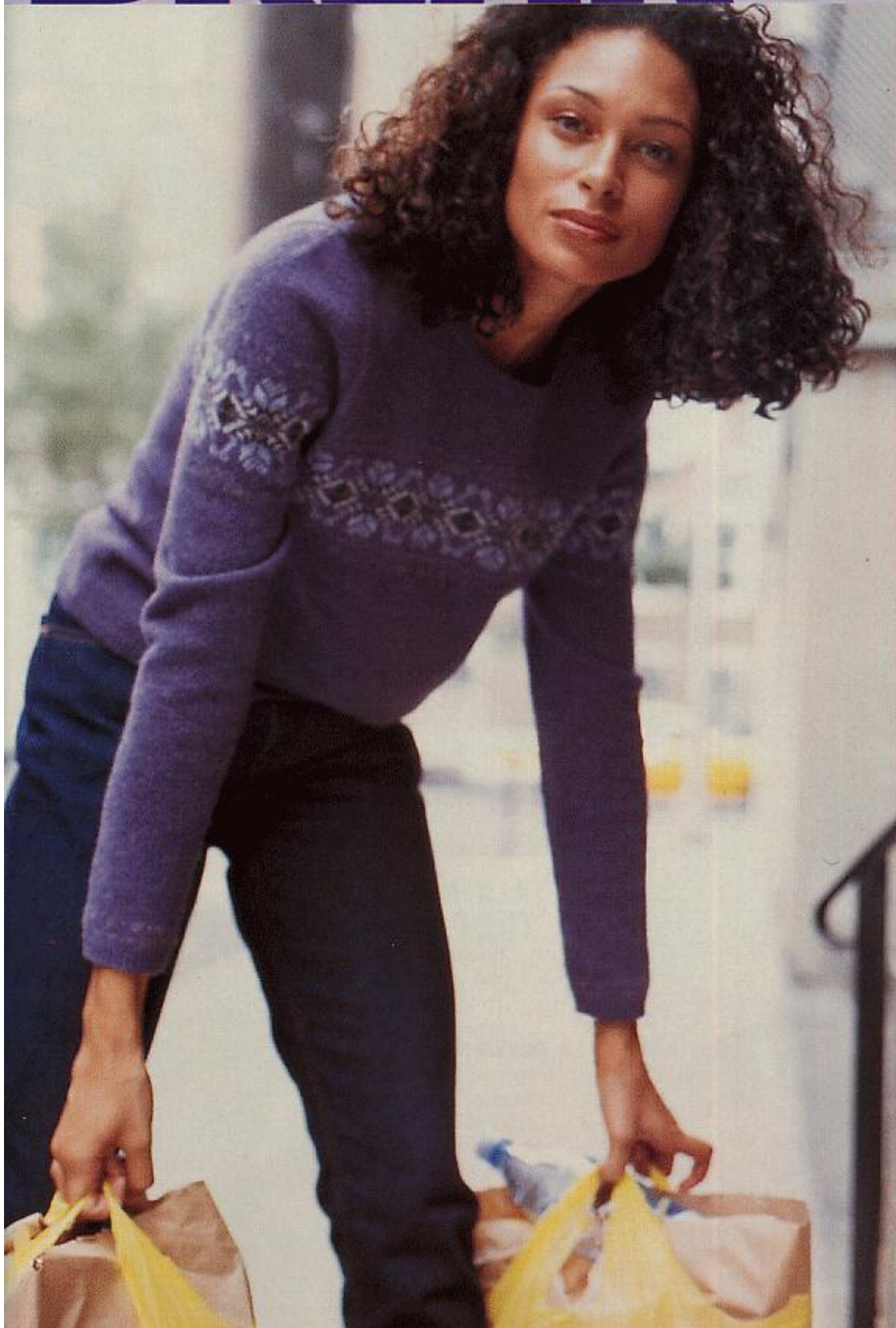
If the daily grind has your body in a slump, our one-minute stretches will relax your muscles so you can exercise longer and feel better

by Kimberly Dawn Neumann



Photographs by Scott Teitle

BREAK



you're halfway through a hard bike workout and your back is screaming for mercy. Or maybe you just lugged a ton of heavy shopping bags all over the mall and your shoulders are feeling the strain. Either way, you feel like your body will be frozen forever in a hunched-over position. It may be, if you don't take action. "Activities like cycling, running or even talking on the phone require you to hold or repeat a specific motion over and over again, which causes muscle imbalances, soreness and strain," says Michele Olson, Ph.D., associate professor of exercise science at Auburn University's Health and Human Performance Laboratory in Montgomery, Alabama. If your posture is looking more and more like Quasimodo's, it's time to get the kinks out. The following mini stretch breaks were designed by Olson and Jessica Huntingdon, a body-alignment specialist at Mount St. Mary's College in Los Angeles, to get your body back in line fast so you can get on with your workout and your day. The result? You'll feel better—and stay healthier.

EVERYDAY PICK-ME-UPS

The following moves will help de-kink your body during daily activities. Take a one-minute break as needed.



HUNCHING OVER A DESK

Pressure Points:

shoulders, neck, chest, back

Posture Break:

Sit erect in your chair, chin up, shoulders aligned with hips, eyes focused ahead. Raise hands above head, arms slightly rounded; lace fingers together with palms down. Inhale and slightly arch your spine, opening your chest and shoulders (be sure not to overrotate shoulders or drop head backward). Pull arms back so elbows extend slightly behind your ears.



LUGGING GROCERIES

Pressure Points:

shoulders, chest, back

Posture Break:

On the way home (or once you're there), put your bags down and stand five feet from a wall. Lunge forward with one leg and place hands against the wall at shoulder height. Press torso toward the wall, rolling shoulder blades back and letting body weight open shoulders and chest. Keep arms extended so chest can move only a few inches.



TALKING ON THE PHONE

Pressure Point:

neck (can lead to pinched nerve in upper vertebrae)

Posture Break:

After you hang up, stand and place the back of your phone-holding hand against your lower back. Press elbow behind you. With the opposite hand, pull your head gently toward your shoulder (keep both shoulders down).



CARRYING A HEAVY SHOULDER BAG

Pressure Points:

back, neck (curvatures and imbalances can weaken muscles and pinch nerves in vertebrae)

Posture Break: Put bag down and place both hands on thighs. Bend knees slightly. Exhale, reach up with your "carrying" arm, gently contract abs and bend to the opposite side (if you carry on your right, bend to the left) and slightly forward.

WORKOUT SLUMP-BUSTERS

These stretches relieve overworked muscles while you're moving. Take a one-minute realignment break every 10 minutes, unless otherwise noted.

CYCLING

Pressure Points:

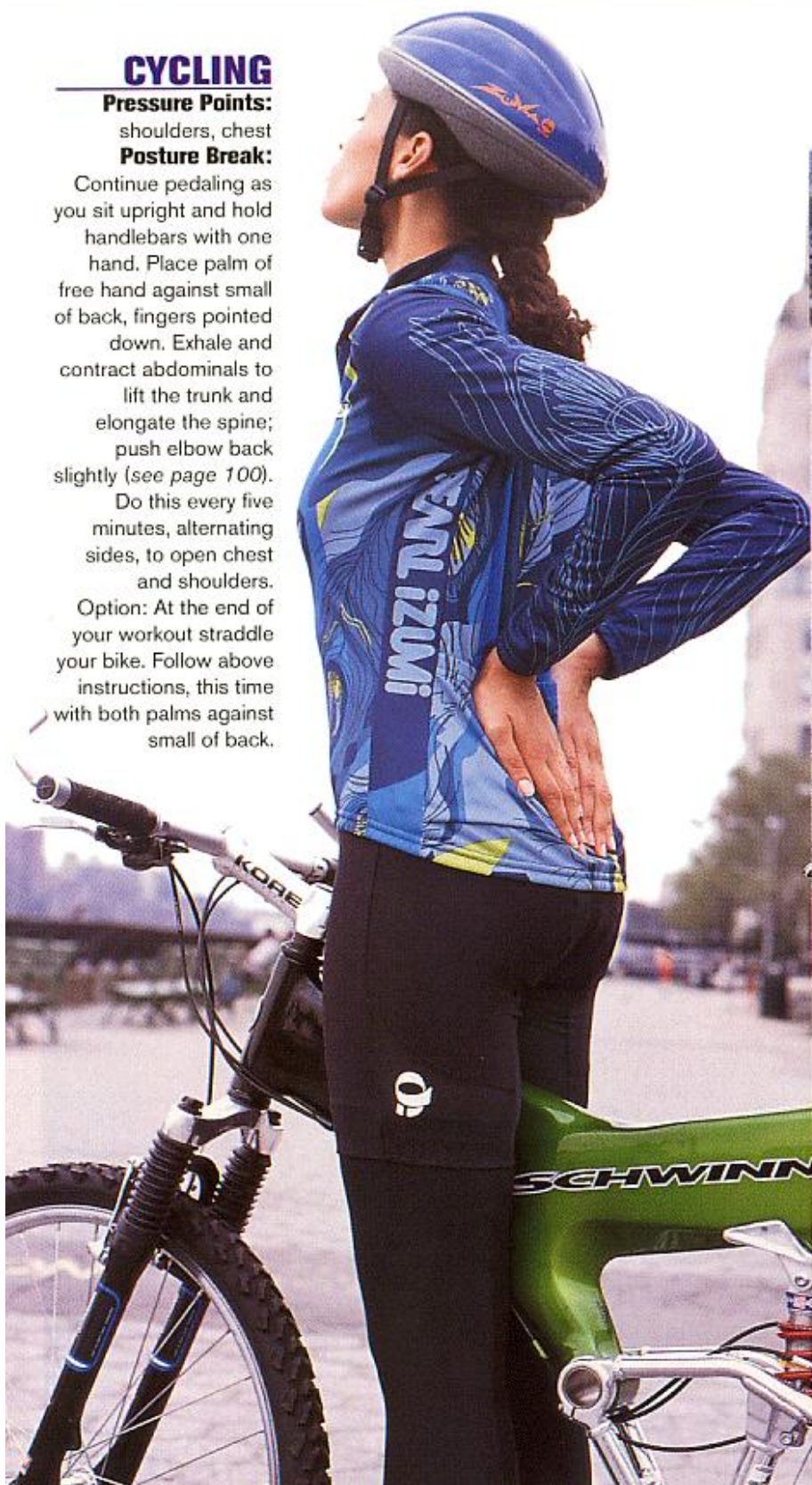
shoulders, chest

Posture Break:

Continue pedaling as you sit upright and hold handlebars with one hand. Place palm of free hand against small of back, fingers pointed down. Exhale and contract abdominals to lift the trunk and elongate the spine; push elbow back slightly (see page 100).

Do this every five minutes, alternating sides, to open chest and shoulders.

Option: At the end of your workout straddle your bike. Follow above instructions, this time with both palms against small of back.



IN-LINE SKATING

Pressure Points:

shoulders, all trunk muscles

Posture Break: Gain enough speed to glide for a moderate distance. To relieve lower-back strain, contract your abs and straighten the torso; to combat rounded shoulders, do a modified "backstroke": Slowly-circle the right arm back and then the left (don't let your arms throw you off balance).



WALKING/ HIKING

Pressure Points:

shoulders, upper back

Posture Break:

Slow down, stand up straight and take long, exaggerated steps.

As you step forward with the left leg, swing left arm (bent at a 90-degree angle, forearm parallel to the ground) behind you and bring right arm around front in a semicircle. Repeat with the right leg, then alternate arms and legs.





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RUNNING

Pressure Points: shoulders, chest, upper back

Posture Break: Keep moving and free up shoulders by giving yourself a big hug: Cross your arms in front of your body and try to touch shoulder blades with your fingertips. Hold for a few seconds and release.

Right: With palms facing down, bring your arms out to sides (elbows bent at 90-degree angles) and pull back, squeezing your shoulder blades together. Alternate between the hug and the pull-back positions. □