



STAND UP FOR YOUR HEALTH

Structured workouts are essential for optimal health. You should also try to stand and move around more during the day, especially if you have a desk job. Sitting for hours on end can increase your risk of serious ailments such as heart disease, type 2 diabetes, and certain cancers. By contrast, you can lower your risks of all of these conditions simply by standing and moving more—even if you already exercise. That’s because routine movement during the day adds on to the benefits of exercise.

That was a conclusion of a large, long-term study of 123,000 middle-aged adults by researchers from the American Cancer Society, published in the American Journal of Epidemiology. Women who sat the most had a 34% greater risk of dying from any cause over the 14 years of study compared with those who sat the least. For men, the increase was 17%. When exercise was factored in, the difference was even starker. The most sedentary women were almost twice as likely to die than their more active counterparts. The most sedentary men were 50% more likely to die than their more active counterparts. Similarly, other studies have concluded that routine, everyday movement has benefits, whether for heart disease, diabetes, cancer, or weight loss. It’s gotten to the point where doctors actually advise their patients to sit “in moderation.”

Why does prolonged sitting have such harmful health consequences? One explanation is that it relaxes your largest heart muscles. When muscles relax, they take up very little sugar (glucose) from the blood, raising your risk of type 2 diabetes. In addition, the enzymes that break down blood fats (triglycerides) plummet, causing levels of the “good” cholesterol, HDL, to fall, too. The result is a higher risk of heart disease.

By contrast, everyday movement not only reduces your risk of major ailments, but also helps you burn more calories. Dr. James Levine at the Mayo Clinic coined the term “non-exercise activity thermogenesis,” or NEAT, to refer to the energy you burn through ordinary activity that you don’t think of as exercise, such as fidgeting, carrying the laundry upstairs, dancing around the house to your favorite tune, or even standing while you talk on the phone. In one study, he measured NEAT in lean and obese people, all of whom had similar jobs and were forbidden to exercise during the course of the study. There was one key difference between the two groups. The obese people sat more than their lean counterparts, by an average of two-and-a-half hours more per day. Changing that behavior could result in burning up to 350 more calories a day.