

4 'NEAT' Ways to Combat Sitting Disease

According to the American Heart Association, sedentary jobs have increased 83 percent since 1950. Physically active jobs now employ only about 25 percent of our workforce.

That is 50 percent less than 1950. Our average work week is also longer. Americans today work 47 hours a week—164 more hours a year than 20 years ago. So now not only are more of us sitting as we earn a living, but we are sitting *longer*—which ironically could mean less time living—as sedentary lifestyles increase risk one's risk for a number of health problems including obesity, diabetes, colon and breast cancer, cognitive decline, stroke, and depression.

Today I want to discuss four “NEAT” ways you can prevent the ill effects of a deskbound job without having to break a sweat. “NEAT,” by the way, is an acronym for non-exercise activity thermogenesis, which basically means performing low-impact movements throughout your work day that keep your metabolism humming and your circulation flowing.

The key is to do one or more of these activities **10 minutes every hour**. Set alarms to remind you, and make your NEAT time a priority.

1. Stretch

When we sit for extended periods, our lower back, hips, and hamstrings become tightened, which leads to pain and immobility and can set you up for injury during physical activities. Here are a few of my favorite beginner-level stretches to help alleviate soreness and inflexibility:

Thread the Needle (target: lower back). Lie on your back and bend both knees with the feet flat on the ground. Bend the

right knee like a figure four, with the outer left ankle on top of right thigh (just above the knee). Lift the left foot into the air, bringing the left calf parallel to the ground. Thread your right hand between the opening of the legs and interlace your hands behind your left thigh. Hold for one to two minutes and then repeat on the opposite side.

Low Lunge (target: hips). Start with your right leg forward with your knee over the ankle. The left knee is on the ground with the top of your foot flat on the floor. Gently lift your chest and rest hands on top of your right thigh. Lean hips forward slightly, keeping your right knee behind the toes, and feel the stretch in the left hip flexor. Hold here for 30-60 seconds, then repeat on the opposite side. For a deeper stretch, raise arms overhead with your biceps by your ears.

Single Leg Hamstring Stretch (target: hamstrings). Sit on the floor with right leg extended out straight. Bend the left leg at the knee and position the sole of that foot against your opposite inner thigh. Extend your arms and reach forward over the right leg by bending at the waist as far as possible. Hold this position for 20-30 seconds and repeat on the left side.

Stand Whenever Possible

When you get a phone call, be NEAT and take a stroll around your office instead of staying at your desk. If you can, take the call outside to get some fresh air and Vitamin D from the sun. Do a few shoulder and neck rolls, small arm circles, even calf raises to improve your blood circulation.

If you're able, go for a 10-15 minute walk after lunch. Doing so has been shown to aid digestion and improve blood sugar levels. And of course, the extra movement will help you unwind, both physically and mentally, after a morning spent in one spot.

Go Old School

Have a question for one of your co-workers? Instead of shooting them an email, walk to their office and ask them in person. Need to tell your kids to get started on their homework? Rather than shouting at or texting them, hop, skip, lunge, or jump (why not?) to where they are and even have them stretch with you (These days, children need to stretch as much as adults do!).

Clean Up

Use your 10-minute NEAT time to do a few chores, such as washing the dishes or folding towels if you're at home, or rearranging your desk and reorganizing your bookshelf if you're at work. If you do this a few times each day, you'll likely find yourself being more productive and feeling happier, all thanks to your tidy surroundings and a trimmer to-do list!

Stay fit, stay faithful.

Diana Anderson-Tyler is the author of *Creation House's Fit for Faith: A Christian Woman's Guide to Total Fitness* and her latest book, *Perfect Fit: Weekly Wisdom and Workouts for Women of Faith and Fitness*. Her popular website can be found at [creationhouse.com](#), and she is the owner and a coach at CrossFit 925. Diana can be reached on Twitter.

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