

Sitting Proclaimed the 'New Smoking'

Could too much time in your chair be killing you? Studies show sitting more than six hours a day puts you on a potentially deadly track, even if you exercise!

That's pretty bad when you consider Americans sit about nine hours a day on average.

When we sit, especially for long periods of time, our bodies tend to shut down, which can lead to an early death.

Dr. James Levine, a Mayo Clinic endocrinologist, is a leading researcher on the health hazards of sitting too much.

The 'New Smoking'

"The trick, the trick, the trick," he said, is to have it firmly fixed in our minds, "that sitting is the new smoking. That sitting is literally bad for you."

For 15 years, Dr. Levine has studied the grim consequences of spending too much time on our duff.

For starters, obese people sit on average two-and-a-half hours more every day than thinner people. Sitting for long periods of time could actually make bottoms bigger because sitting down puts a large amount of force on the body tissues that make fat cells.

It causes them to produce up to 50 percent more.

But that's just the tip of the iceberg.

"People who sit for a prolonged period of time throughout the day are predisposed to developing diabetes, and those people who have diabetes, their diabetes gets worse," Levine warned.

Add to that increased blood pressure and more, including emotional problems.

“People who sit more are more prone to cancers, breast cancer, prostate cancer, colon, I mean, multiple cancers,” Levine explained.

“In addition, they’re more prone to depression, to feeling blue,” he said. “Even people who have mental illness, their illness is actually worse.”

Walk While Working

As a potential solution, Dr. Levine worked with companies to improve employee health. He also teamed-up with Steelcase, the office furniture company, to develop the Walkstation, a desk with a treadmill built right into it.

The Walkstation allows users to stroll at a very slow pace all day for optimum health. In fact, the Walkstation doesn’t even go any faster than two miles per hour.

Corporations nationwide have been clamoring to jump on the Walkstation bandwagon. But at about \$3,500 each, although they are considered the gold standard of treadmill desks, not everyone can afford one.

Fortunately, there are cheaper alternatives. Jill Weisenberger, a nutritionist and author who has a home office, spent less than \$500 for something similar.

“I was sitting for hours and hours and hours, sometimes for 10 or so hours,” she recalled. “And I just know all that sitting is bad for you.”

Weisenberger realized she had a problem when she began writing her nutrition book, *Diabetes Weight Loss: Week by Week: A Safe, Effective Method for Losing Weight and Improving Your Health*.

As a health expert herself, she became concerned about the repercussions of sitting all day even though she exercised every morning.

Weisenberger purchased the TrekDesk online for about \$479. The TrekDesk is a wide, tall, adjustable desk that fits virtually any existing treadmill. She simply put it over the treadmill she already owned.

“Ever since I got the desk I don’t complain about back pain and I’m much more comfortable” she smiled.

Weisenberger keeps her pace at just 1.4 miles an hour so she can concentrate on her work. The slow pace means she doesn’t ever get sweaty or out-of-breath.

“I could be on it for three to seven hours, and so I almost always walk about 30-some miles a week,” she said.

Stand Up Operation

Although a treadmill desk is the preferred method of beating the “sitting all day blues,” it’s not always practical. The next best thing is a standing desk. It’s also cheaper than a treadmill desk.

CBN’s Dorothy Schulte produces promotions for *The 700 Club*. She figured out an inexpensive way to avoid sitting down all day by designing her own standup desk.

As a result, she said she feels so much better.

“I noticed a lot of the back pain went away,” she said. “I was a lot less tired at the end of the day.”

For just \$35, she simply attached two wooden blocks to the bottom of her regular desk, raising it about 10 inches. She also replaced her chair with a bar stool.

“I don’t stand the whole day, constantly,” she explained.

"I'll probably go back and forth 30, 45 minutes at a time."

Off Your Duff

If you can't walk or stand at your desk, don't worry. There are still lots of things you can do to minimize the health hazards of a desk job.

For example, offset the effects of sitting by taking the stairs at your work place, instead of the elevator.

Levine recommends using a portable stair-stepper periodically throughout the day.

"Slide it under the desk," he advised. "When the phone goes, you pull it out, and start stepping away."

Another idea to break up the long hours sitting is to set an alarm as a reminder to take a lap or two around your work area. It's a practice that might not seem like much, but Levine said short, sporadic movement really adds up.

"People get as much or potentially more benefit from being up and walking a little bit every hour than going to the gym three times a week," he said.

Instead of emailing a co-worker, walk over to them. Choose the printer that's far from your desk, and park far away from your building.

"I'd say the number one item, and we've deployed this in over 60 corporations in the United States, is walk-and-talk meetings," Levine said.

Also, walk at lunchtime. A good way to measure how you're doing is to wear a pedometer, which keeps track of how many steps you're taking. A good goal is 10,000 a day.

The Bottom Line

The office isn't the only danger zone. When you get home,

avoid being a couch potato.

Studies show each hour sitting in front of the television means an 11 percent higher death risk.

So the bottom line is, there are lots of ways to get off your bottom! That way you can keep your desk job and your good health.