



Risks of Inactivity: Why You Need to Exercise to Be Healthy

What do sitting, smoking and obesity have in common? All are risk factors for chronic disease.

Researchers have been investigating ways to reduce our risk of chronic disease for decades. One big question: How much exercise is needed to prevent disease? The answer is at least 150 minutes per week. According to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services' physical activity guidelines, adults should participate in at least 150 minutes of moderate-intensity aerobic physical activity per week, including at least two days of muscle-strengthening activities. While exercising up to 300 minutes per week has even greater health benefits.

This guideline was developed with the assumption that we are doing light physical activity throughout the day including walking and standing. However, many adults are mostly sedentary during the day. Many of us sit all day at our jobs and technology has replaced our need to do physical work.

Research shows that individuals who sit all day, even if they go to the gym for an hour, are at greater disease risk than those who are more active during the day. "Informal" physical activity such as walking to a coworker's desk, around the mall or through the parking lot can add up to a lot of minutes throughout the day and is beneficial to overall health.

What is physical inactivity?

Physical inactivity is anytime you are not standing or moving. Sitting at your desk, watching TV or being in your car for a long commute all fall into this category. Our health is impaired by how many hours we spend each day sitting, as well as the duration of those stints of inactivity. Even those who exercise for 150 minutes each week aren't safe from the dangers of sitting for too long.

What are the risks?

Many parameters to assess disease risk include blood sugar, insulin, HDL (the good cholesterol), waist circumference, triglycerides, weight and blood pressure. Researchers have also studied the relationship between sitting and indicators of inflammation, which is common in people with heart disease. Studies have even investigated inactivity and risk of premature death. All of these outcomes can be negatively impacted by physical inactivity: The more you sit, the greater your risk for disease and early death.

How can we reduce physical inactivity at home and at work?

While there is no published recommendation for "safe" sitting time yet, a good rule of thumb is to move for at least 1 to 2 minutes each hour in addition to 150 minutes of moderate physical activity each week. If your job is sedentary, you can break up that time with bits of activity to improve your health. Here are a few tips to get moving throughout the day:

- Use a pedometer to track daily steps and aim for a goal such as 10,000 steps per day.
- Park far away from your building or use public transportation.
- Use a standing or walking desk.
- Have walking meetings, instead of sitting in the conference room.
- Take a brisk walk after lunch.
- Rather than send an email, walk to your co-worker.
- Stand during phone calls.
- Drink enough water that you use the restroom often.
- Play pool, go for a walk or play lawn games instead of watching TV.

Source: Academy for Nutrition and Dietetics; <http://www.eatright.org/resource/fitness/exercise/benefits-of-physical-activity/risks-of-inactivity-why-you-need-to-exercise-to-be-healthy>

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