

## **Stand Up for Your Health: Combat the Perils of “Sitting Disease”!**



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A 2015 analysis of 41 international studies, published in the *Annals of Internal Medicine*, found that excessive sitting is associated with a higher risk of heart disease, diabetes, cancer and death, regardless of regular exercise. Researchers found that prolonged sedentary behavior contributes to a 15 to 20 percent higher risk of death from any cause and as much as a 90 percent increased risk of developing diabetes.

Most non-clinical health care professionals and administrators spend the majority of their workdays sitting. For instance, medical and health services managers are seated an average of 73.3 percent of their workday, according to the [Bureau of Labor Statistics](#), while medical record and health information technicians sit an average of 85.4 percent of the time.

Given the daily demands of your job, you are likely unaware how much continuous “seat time” at work you are accumulating. That is not even factoring in the amount of personal time you are seated while commuting, dining,

lounging or engaging in recreational activities.

### **What is “Sitting Disease”? How is it Negatively Affecting Our Health?**

“Sitting disease” is a term created by the health care community to communicate the potential ill effects of a sedentary lifestyle. This includes sitting for long periods of time and/or spending hours at a time with little movement. All of these sedentary behaviors have been linked to a myriad of increased health risks including obesity, high blood pressure, lower levels of LDL or “good” cholesterol, high blood sugar (diabetes) and an increased risk of heart disease. As Mayo Clinic cardiologist [Martha Grogan states](#) “For people who sit most of the day, their risk of heart attack is about the same as smoking.”

While sitting is the most common form of sedentary behavior among working professionals, any protracted activity requiring little or no physical energy is considered a sedentary behavior. Sitting disease is not just seen in office workers, it is also among those who are sedentary in other activities such as extended television watching, protracted video gaming or prolonged driving/commuting.

### **Current Research on “Sitting Disease”**

The mechanisms driving negative health effects related to prolonged sitting have not been fully determined. Current research suggests that sitting disease has harmful effects on sugar and fat metabolism, which can lead to diabetes, obesity and heart disease.

Consider some of the following research:

- A [2015 report](#) found that more than 50% of our waking hours are spent sitting.
- A [2010 American Cancer Society study](#) indicated that (during the time period studied):
  - Women who sat more than 6 hours a day and were relatively sedentary were 94 percent more likely to die than those who were physically active and sat less than 3 hours per day.
  - Men who sat more than 6 hours daily and were relatively inactive were 48 percent more likely to die than their non-sitting male colleagues.
- A [2015 study](#) found that exercise alone cannot undo the negative health effects of excessive sitting; the study indicates that sitting many hours each day increased the risk of coronary artery calcification, regardless of exercise level.

While the American Heart Association recommends “at least 150 minutes per week of moderate exercise or 75 minutes per week of vigorous exercise (or a combination of moderate and vigorous activity),” unfortunately, this guideline does not take into effect the harm being done if we are sedentary the rest of the day. Regrettably, many of us have become so sedentary that the detrimental effects of 8+ hours a day of sitting may not be neutralized by 30 or more minutes a day of vigorous exercise.

## Common-Sense Counteractive Strategies

At first blush, the best approach to fighting “sitting disease” is simply to move around more and sit less. While that sounds easy, you will likely also need some simple ways to help accomplish this goal.

Consider incorporating some of following ideas into your daily routine:

- **Get a movement-encouraging app on your smart phone.** Download an app that encourages physical movement and use it to help you remember to get out of your chair. Possible app options include: StandApp, Hotseat, Stand Alarm, Move More, Time to Move and Stand Up! If you don’t like apps, you can set a watch or alarm, or set a reminder in your calendar to stand up, take a walk or stretch several times a day.
- **Stand or walk whenever possible.** Consider standing whenever you talk on the phone at work or home, or when you’re eating a snack or lunch. Improvise or invest in a standing desk. Walk the stairs as an alternative to taking the elevator. Purposely park as far away as possible from your building’s entrance.
- **Walk during your meetings.** When feasible, hold a walking meeting. Walk laps and have a discussion with colleagues in close proximity to you, in lieu of instant messaging or e-mail conversations.
- **Use the “20-8-2” rule.** For every 20 minutes of sitting, try to stand for 8 minutes and move your body for 2.
- **Track how much you walk each day.** Get a simple pedometer to track how many steps you are taking in a day. Strive for a minimum of 5,000 steps per day and work up to 10,000 steps per day over time. Reward yourself (in a non-caloric and non-sedentary way) for meeting your walking goals.
- **Use the TV to remind you.** Walk, stretch or exercise during commercials while watching TV. Stand and stretch while watching your favorite weekly TV shows.

If you are a manager/supervisor, encourage your employees to get up and away from their chairs by doing so yourself, and suggesting that they do likewise. Host weekly (or even daily) group outings that get staff members moving. Hold friendly intra-office exercise or fitness competitions. Bring in an outside expert, such as a nutritionist or fitness instructor, to speak to your employees and offer up new ideas.

The steps for combatting “sitting disease” both at work and in life don’t have to be complex to be effective. How about picking at least one of the suggestions above, and trying to make a habit of it?

Bottom line, whether you work in a clinical or non-clinical role, as an employee in the health care industry, it’s important for you to engage in and model healthy, non-sedentary activities. By doing so, you will likely be more productive at work, and more importantly improve your own health!