

# Is Sitting Truly the New Smoking?

BY ALEISHA FETTERS

OCTOBER 19, 2016



Sitting is a part of life, yes. But we're sitting so much these days, and it's catching up to us. "In recent years, more and more attention has been brought to the potentially harmful side effects of spending too much time in a seated position," says Justin Russ, a strength and conditioning coach for IMG Academy in Florida. "Excessive sitting can lead to an increased risk of heart disease, high blood pressure, high cholesterol and obesity." A recent study even compared sitting to smoking.

Unfortunately, for many of us, whether we work out or not, we're spending relatively equal parts of our days on our rear ends — in the car, at our desks, on the couch, you name it. Research from Northwestern University shows that women who regularly exercise spend just as much time sitting as do women who are inactive. And a 2015 meta-analysis published in the Annals of Internal Medicine found that time spent sitting, regardless of exercise, is associated with an increased risk of all-cause mortality, heart disease, cancer and Type 2 diabetes.

So, is there any way to counter the ill effects of sitting? Or are we doomed?

New research suggests that it is possible to counteract "sitting disease." The thing is, it requires more activity than what organizations like the

World Health Organization and the American Heart Association recommend.

For instance, a 2015 Circulation review of 12 studies involving more than 370,000 men and women found that those who followed the AHA's 30-minute daily guidelines were associated with "modest reductions" in heart failure risk. However, those who spent two and four times that amount enjoyed a "substantial risk reduction" of 20% and 35%, respectively. Basically, the more you move, the less risk your desk job poses to your health.

Meanwhile, a 2016 study of more than 1 million adults published in The Lancet found that exercising one hour for every eight hours spent sitting results in a significant reduction — and in some cases, elimination — in the risk of death from heart disease, diabetes and some cancers associated with sitting.

The news gets better: Fortunately for all of the time-strapped people out there, that hour per day doesn't have to happen in one chunk. You can spread it out, according to researchers: in the gym, at the office, on the way to pick your kids up from school, anywhere.

Here are five tips to help you exercise your way out of the negative effects of sitting, no matter how many hours you spend each day on your rear end:

### **1. Steer clear of the exercise machines.**

"What do 90% of exercise machines have in common? They place the exerciser in a seated position," Russ says. He recommends swapping out exercise machine workouts for functional free-weight workouts centered around basic human movement patterns like the squat, deadlift, lunge, pull and rotate.

### **2. Take hourly mini breaks.**

“If you sit at a desk from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m., try to move every hour throughout the day,” says Tonya Dugger, an American Council on Exercise-certified trainer and group fitness manager at Equinox in Chicago. She notes that moving even two to three minutes every hour can get blood moving to keep your body healthy. Try downloading an app that lets you set it so that every hour, your screen dims, a “break” theme appears and you’re encouraged to get up. Try performing one round of a body-weight circuit in your cubicle every hour. (We promise that you won’t get too sweaty.)

### **3. Watch your “active minutes.”**

Many fitness trackers display not just steps taken per day but also “active minutes,” which can help you gauge your active undertakings that *don’t* involve putting one foot in front of the other. After all, pushups won’t count toward your step totals, but they will certainly help you combat sitting. “Take advantage of the data to motivate yourself to hit new numbers,” he says.

### **4. Schedule walking meetings.**

Apart from getting you on your feet, walking meetings are actually more productive than those held in chairs, says Kathleen Hale, founder of [Chair Free Project](#). “Start with holding meetings with co-workers whom you believe would be receptive to the idea,” she says. “As others see you happily walking and chatting, the movement just might catch on.”

### **5. Name one task a standing one.**

“To remind ourselves to get out of our chairs, we need a cue,” Hale says. “Pick a task that you can do while standing and make it your ‘get up’ cue. Maybe it’s talking on the phone, reviewing documents or even checking social media. When it is time to perform whichever task you picked, stand up to get the job done. Even these short breaks from sitting can really make a difference.