

# Sedentary lifestyles up mortality risks for older women

January 22 2014, by Sharyn Alden

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Older women who spend a majority of their day sitting or lying down are at increased risk for cardiovascular disease, coronary heart disease, cancer and death, finds a new study from the *American Journal of Preventive Medicine*.

"Women who were sedentary more than 11 hours a day were most at risk," said Rebecca Seguin, Ph.D., lead author and assistant professor in the division of nutritional sciences at Cornell University.

Seguin and her colleagues analyzed the connection between a sedentary lifestyle and mortality risks of 92,234 [postmenopausal women](#) 50 to 79-years-old. Between 1993 and 1998, participants in the Women's

Health Initiative Study were interviewed in-person and with questionnaires that assessed how many hours they spent sitting or lying down in four categories: less than 4, 4-8 hours, 8-11 hours or more than 11 hours a day. The average amount of time spent sedentary was 8.5 hours a day.

Women who spent the most time sedentary were more likely to be White, to have a college degree and have higher body mass indexes (BMIs), she added. Sedentary women were more likely to report fair to poor health, to be smokers and to have more falls in the past 12 months. Even when factoring in physical limitations due to chronic diseases, which are more likely to affect [older women](#), being sedentary increased the risk of mortality.

Rebecca Jaffe, M.D., MPH, a private practice family physician and board member of the American Academy of Family Physicians, pointed out that while people may know that exercise is useful, knowing that their sedentary lifestyle can be harmful to their health may be a wake-up call to add more exercise in their life.

"Sedentary lifestyles often have consequences in people in all ages, but exercise is medicine," she said. "Just by doing some form of activity, older [women](#) possibly gain benefits that overshadow their chronic ailments."

Seguin agrees, noting that "it can be challenging for many people to limit sitting and lying down time including screen time at home and work, driving and commuting to no more than 10 hours a day. That's why it is good to get up and leave your desk for bouts of time every hour or two."

Jaffe said almost all older adults can do some form of physical exercise on a regular basis but motivating them to do so is another thing. "Many [family physicians](#) know and understand the benefits of exercise. We

emphasize health lifestyles every with our patients. But patients may need to hear it from multiple sources (such as the findings of this study) to help with the transformation to a healthier way of life."

Provided by Health Behavior News Service

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