

Older people can learn to spend less time sitting down

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Older adults spend 8.5 waking hours a day sitting or lying down—time linked to obesity, heart disease, diabetes, and death—even if they're physically active at other times. A new study showed it was feasible to coach older people to spend less time sitting: an average of a half hour less per day. They reported feeling more able to accomplish everyday tasks—and they walked faster and had fewer depression symptoms.

"I feel lethargic when I sit all day," said Gerald Alexander, an 82-year-old retired social service worker among the 25 Group Health patients who participated in the Take Active Breaks from Sitting (TABS) pilot study. "I feel much peppier when I stand and take walks."

Retirement may be more golden if less of it is spent in a resting position. Yet older adults spend an average of 8.5 waking hours a day sitting or lying down, according to TABS study leader Dori Rosenberg, PhD, MPH, an assistant scientific investigator at Group Health Research Institute. More of this kind of time has been linked to obesity, [heart disease](#), diabetes, and death—even if people are [physically active](#) at other times of the day.

"We're not sure whether [older people](#) can improve their health by reducing the time they spend sitting," Dr. Rosenberg said. "To prove that, we need randomized trials—and none have been done yet in [older adults](#)." As a first step toward such a trial, she conducted the TABS study, which showed that it was feasible to coach adults aged 60 and older to spend less time sitting: an average of 27 minutes less per day.

They reported feeling more able to accomplish everyday tasks. And data suggested that after coaching, they also walked faster and had fewer symptoms of depression.

Health Education & Behavior published the new study's quantitative results: "The Feasibility of Reducing Sitting Time in Overweight and Obese Older Adults." And *The Gerontologist* published its results from interviews with participants: "Motivators and Barriers to Reducing Sedentary Behavior Among Overweight and Obese Older Adults."

How coaching worked

In the TABS study, health coaches talked by phone with each participant five times during eight weeks. The coaches used motivational interviewing to engage participants in setting personalized goals to sit less by standing and moving more—and to take more breaks from sitting throughout the day. Participants tracked how much they thought they were sitting. And at baseline, midway through the study, and at its end, participants used two devices for a week to measure how much they were [sitting](#). They also received charts showing feedback from these measurements. Participants found the feedback charts most helpful, followed by the coaching phone calls.

"The feedback was like a reward for standing up and moving," Mr. Alexander said.

Provided by Group Health Research Institute

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