

Study finds targeting exercise is not the best way to reduce prolonged sitting

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Targeting sitting time, rather than physical activity, is the most effective way to reduce prolonged sitting, according to the first comprehensive review of strategies designed to reduce sitting time. The research, led by the Institute of Psychiatry, Psychology & Neuroscience (IoPPN) at King's College London, is published in the journal *Health Psychology Review*.

Prolonged sitting has become a serious [public health](#) concern, with modern lifestyles becoming increasingly sedentary and many professions requiring workers to sit for most of the day. Previous studies and reviews have shown that higher levels of sitting are linked with cancer, diabetes, heart disease and even an early death, independently of whether a person takes regular exercise. Public health interventions have the potential to reduce prolonged sitting, but until now, little has been known about what makes certain sitting reduction strategies effective.

For the first time, this new study has shown that increasing levels of physical activity is likely to be much less effective at reducing prolonged sitting than directly attempting to decrease sitting time.

The research team, led by Dr Benjamin Gardner, from the Department of Psychology at the IoPPN, King's College London, searched the current existing literature on trials of interventions that sought to reduce sitting time. The team then categorised these studies according to their effectiveness, and examined the strategies that had been used in each trial to try to reduce sitting. The studies were deemed promising, where

those who received the intervention did reduce sitting time, or not promising, where the interventions did not reduce sitting time.

Out of the 38 interventions assessed, a majority of 23 (60 per cent) were found promising whilst 15 (39 per cent) were found not promising.

Some of the promising interventions included the provision of sit-stand desks at work, though other techniques such as encouraging people to keep records of their own sitting time, setting individual goals for limiting sitting time, and using prompts and cues to remind people to stop them sitting, were also found to help reduce sitting time, even when used in isolation.

In addition, effective interventions tended to educate people about the health benefits of reducing their sitting time.

In view of their study, the researchers now recommend that sitting time should be viewed as a separate behaviour change target to [physical activity](#). They hope their findings can be used by public health workers and policy makers responsible for designing new interventions to reduce sitting time and improve the overall health of those who may sit for prolonged periods.

Dr Benjamin Gardner at King's College London, said: 'These findings will be of interest to researchers and practitioners designing new ways to reduce [prolonged sitting](#), because they suggest which strategies may be most fruitful.

'However, the findings should also be of interest to anyone looking to improve their health by reducing their own [sitting time](#) in their day-to-day lives, as many of these interventions can be adopted on an individual level.'

Professor Stuart Biddle, at Victoria University in Australia and co-author of the study, added: 'The ill effects of high levels of sitting may prove to be especially damaging given that so many people sit for long periods.'

'The importance of this study is not in showing that interventions can work, but in pointing out how they might work. This is crucial if behaviour is to be achieved more efficiently and effectively.'

Provided by King's College London

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