

Sitting all day? Science says there's an easy way to counteract the harmful effects

February 1 2023



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We don't need a doctor to tell us that sitting for long hours is bad for our health. Now a research team in the United States claims there's a trouble-free answer to maintaining our good health while doing so.

According to findings published in the journal *Medicine & Science in Sports & Exercise*, five minutes of light walking every half hour can offset the negative impacts.

Sit less, move more

"What we know now is that for optimal health, you need to move regularly at work, in addition to a daily exercise routine," stated lead author Keith Diaz, assistant professor of behavioral medicine at Columbia University Medical Center, in a news release. "While that may sound impractical, our findings show that even small amounts of walking spread through the work day can significantly lower your risk of heart disease and other [chronic illnesses](#)."

The researchers asked 11 healthy middle-aged and older participants to sit in ergonomic chairs for eight hours and go on regular walking breaks. They were instructed to either walk for one minute every 30 minutes, one minute every 60 minutes, five minutes every 30 minutes, five minutes every 60 minutes, or not at all.

They found that walking for five minutes as slow as 3 kilometers per hour every 30 minutes provided the most optimal health benefits. These mainly included regulating [blood sugar](#) and pressure. In addition, the volunteers felt less fatigued and more energized. They were also in a better mood.

"We've known for probably about a decade now that sitting increases your risk for most [chronic diseases](#) and increases your risk for [early death](#)," Prof. Diaz told "CNN." "Just like how much fruits and vegetables they should eat and how much exercise they should do, we need to give (people) specific guidance on how to combat the harms of sitting."

Easier said than done

But just how practical is all this at the office? "There are so many of us who lead inactive or sitting-based lifestyles or have sitting-based jobs," he added. "There are these [social norms](#) where if you are up out of your desk, people think you're not working."

Prof. Diaz believes businesses should see this from another perspective, one that concerns the bottom line. "Sitting is an occupational hazard and a healthy employee is a more productive employee."

Are standing desks the solution? "I'm not sure there's really solid scientific evidence that standing is really any better than sitting," he explained. "I worry that people have this false sense that they are healthy because they are using this desk, and maybe they're not actually that much better."

Prof. Diaz says that the main point is to move, in any way, shape or form. "To the extent that you can break up your sitting with some kind of movement breaks, you're still going to yield some benefit."

More information: Andrea Duran et al, Breaking Up Prolonged Sitting to Improve Cardiometabolic Risk: Dose-Response Analysis of a Randomized Cross-Over Trial, *Medicine & Science in Sports & Exercise* (2023). [DOI: 10.1249/MSS.00000000000003109](https://doi.org/10.1249/MSS.00000000000003109).
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Provided by CORDIS

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science-easy-counteract-effects.html

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