

All that sitting at work is shortening your life

January 19 2024, by Ernie Mundell



Your office chair could be a killer.

New research shows that folks who spent most of their workday sitting

were 16% more prone to an [early death](#), compared to folks in non-sitting jobs.

The Taiwanese study did offer workers a glimmer of hope, however: Getting up & moving a bit during the workday or adding a bit of leisure-time exercise greatly reduced the risk.

The researchers hope that, someday, days spent sitting for work might be looked upon as just another unwanted, unhealthy habit.

"Prolonged occupational sitting is [now] considered normal," the investigators said. But more information on just how fatal a life spent sitting can be may "denormalize this common behavior, similar to the processes of denormalizing smoking."

The study was led by Dr. Chi-Pang Wen of the National Health Research Institute in Zhunan, Taiwan. It was [published](#) Jan. 19 in the journal *JAMA Network Open*.

Numerous studies have already found that as hours per day spent sitting rise, health declines. And sitting's dangers may not be simply that sitting equals time not spent in activity.

There could be something specific to the posture of sitting that is especially harmful, the research team said.

Sitting may bring about a weakening of the legs and trunk and "increased [blood flow](#) to lower extremities," as well as low-grade inflammation, Wen's group explained.

In turn, that could "lead to reduced insulin action, diabetes, obesity, [metabolic syndrome](#) and reduced kidney function" over time, they said.

In the study, Wen's group analyzed detailed data on the [everyday lives](#) of almost 482,000 Taiwanese people averaging about 39 years of age.

Data on their leisure-time [physical activity](#), as well as how many hours they spent sitting at work, was collected. Participants' health was also tracked for an average of about 13 years.

Compared to people who didn't sit at work, folks who said they sat through most of their workdays had a greater chance of dying over the course of the study.

That risk rose with age, and was somewhat more pronounced in women (21%) than men (13%), the study found.

When looking at deaths from [heart disease](#), Wen's group found that people who mostly sat through their workdays had a 34% higher risk than non-sitters. Risks were roughly similar for men and women.

However, small changes at work or home did seem to mitigate all these health risks.

The study found that people whose workdays consisted of a combination of sitting and moving around "did not experience increased risk of all-cause mortality."

To Wen and his colleagues, that suggests that workplace interventions—regular activity breaks or the use of standing worktables rather than chairs—might undercut the dangers of prolonged sitting.

Exercise outside of working hours—an increase of just 15 to 30 minutes per day—also brought about a reduction in risk for early death back to the level of a person who didn't sit at work, the Taiwanese team said.

The bottom line, according to the authors, is that "systemic [workplace] changes, such as more frequent breaks, standing desks, designated workplace areas for physical activity and gym membership benefits" could help otherwise chair-bound workers stay healthy.

More information: Gao et al, Occupational Sitting Time, Leisure Physical Activity, and All-Cause and Cardiovascular Disease Mortality, *JAMA Network Open* (2024). [DOI: 10.1001/jamanetworkopen.2023.50680](https://doi.org/10.1001/jamanetworkopen.2023.50680)

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