

Exercise counteracts sitting time

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Credit: Peter Griffin/Public Domain

Office workers can stave off health problems associated with sitting down all day by regularly exercising, a new study has found.

Being [physically active](#) may offset some of the deleterious consequences of spending large amounts of time not being active, the paper published in *BMC Public Health* has revealed.

The study further emphasises the importance of physical activity in the promotion and maintenance of health.

In contrast, people described as 'couch potatoes' are putting their health at risk by spending too much time sat down and not exercising, the paper said. Low sedentary (sitting) time in the absence of physical activity is associated with higher HDL (good) cholesterol levels.

Sedentary behaviour is defined as habitual sitting time. Higher levels of sedentary behaviour are associated with worse health, whereas higher levels of physical activity are associated with better health. However, the extent to which the combination of these behaviours influence health is less well-known.

The aim of this study was to examine the associations of four categories of physical activity and sedentary time compared with markers of diabetes and heart disease.

The researchers used data from the 2008 Health Survey to paint a nationally representative sample of English adults.

They grouped people into the following categories, including the physically active (those meeting the recommended guidelines for physical activity) and low sedentary 'busy bees', the physically active and high sedentary 'sedentary exercisers', the physically inactive (those not meeting the recommended guidelines for physical activity) and low sedentary 'light movers' and physically inactive and high sedentary 'couch potatoes'.

Lead researcher Dr Thomas Yates, from the Leicester Diabetes Centre and the University of Leicester, concluded: "We demonstrate that in comparison to adults who are physically inactive with high sedentary time, those who are physically active have a more desirable health profile across multiple cardiometabolic markers even when combined with high sedentary time. In contrast, low [sedentary time](#) in the absence of physical activity is associated with higher HDL-cholesterol levels.

"By suggesting that being physically active may offset some of the deleterious consequences of routinely engaging in high levels of sedentary behaviour, this study further emphasises the importance of physical activity in the promotion and maintenance of health.

"However, given the observational design, the relative magnitude of effect of physical activity and sedentary behaviour on [health](#) needs further examination through experimental or intervention level research."

University of Leicester researcher Kishan Bakrania, who also worked on the study, added: "This research is significant because it demonstrates yet

again why [physical activity](#) and exercise is so important. It shows that people who spend large amounts of time not moving either through work, leisure or lifestyle can counteract some of the negative effects of sedentary behaviour by regularly exercising."

More information: Kishan Bakrania et al.

Associations of mutually exclusive categories of physical activity and sedentary time with markers of cardiometabolic health in English adults: a cross-sectional analysis of the Health Survey for England, *BMC Public Health* (2016). [DOI: 10.1186/s12889-016-2694-9](#)

Provided by University of Leicester

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