

A Report on the Effects of Sitting

A doctor at the Mayo Clinic in Rochester, Minn., calls it the "sitting disease," likening the ill effects of inactivity that doctors are still discovering to the discovery of the side effects of smoking.

Dr. James Levine helped initiate a new study at a small company in Minneapolis. "Work-fit" stations have replaced 30 desks so that employees can now sit or stand while working. Levine himself has been walking on a treadmill while he works for years. The study, and a handful of similar studies worldwide, are ongoing.

"Researchers have linked sitting for prolonged periods with a number of health problems and premature death from cardiovascular disease," Levine wrote on the Mayo Clinic website.

"In one study, adults who spent more than four hours a day sitting in front of the television had an 80 percent increased risk of death from cardiovascular disease compared with adults who spent less than two hours a day in front of the TV. This risk was independent of other risk factors such as smoking or diet."

The solution, Levine said, is not extra gym time, which doesn't seem to offset the risk.

"Rather, the solution seems to be less sitting and more moving," he wrote. "Simply by standing, you burn three times as many calories as you do sitting. Muscle contractions, including the ones required for standing, seem to trigger important processes related to the breakdown of fats and sugars. When you sit down, muscle contractions cease and these processes stall."

Another new study published in *Medicine & Science in Sports & Exercise* showed that blood sugar tends to spike more with low activity levels.

Researchers at the University of Missouri asked people who usually exercised to spend three days in a sedentary lifestyle. Although the participants ate the same foods, their blood sugar spiked after meals, increasing by about 26 percent, compared with their blood sugar levels when they exercised.

"You don't have to run marathons," John P. Thyfault, an associate professor of nutrition and exercise physiology at the University of Missouri, told *The New York Times*. "But the evidence is clear that you do need to move."

If your job involves sitting in a desk a good eight hours a day, try the 60:3 plan to add a little exercise. For every hour you spend working, get up and move for three minutes.

You could run work related errands, like picking up printouts or meeting with a co-worker. Or you could hit the stairwell and walk a few flights. Do that seven times a day and you will add 20 minutes of activity.

This health tip comes from the staff at Grand Valley Health Plan. The dietitians say even sedentary office workers can find ways to sneak a little exercise into their day.

Other suggestions: Send printouts to the farthest printer. Walk to the farthest bathroom. Hold walk-and-talk meetings. When you go upstairs, walk up an extra flight.

Research shows people who are most active in their daily lives are less likely to gain weight, the dietitians say.

City officials in Presque Isle, Maine, embraced this concept, adopting a ["Sit for 60, Move for 3" campaign](#).

They created posters encouraging workers to get up and stretch, do simple exercises or walk around every hour.

About 29 percent of employees said they followed the advice.

Grand Valley is providing a tip every day in January to help people get a healthy start to the new year. The organization is offering a free, community wide weight loss challenge, which includes classes, nutritional counseling and a prize drawing for everyone who loses at least 12 pounds in 2012.

Rick Amundson | Health & Wellness Consultant | Excellus BCBS
165 Court Street, Rochester, NY 14647 | P: 585.339.7845 | rick.amundson@excellus.com