

New Study Shows Health Risks of Too Much Sitting



Many workers, particularly those in office workplaces, spend a lot of time sitting on the job. On its face, sitting may not seem like an activity that's hazardous to one's health. But a new study from Toronto researchers found that the amount of time a person sits during the day is associated with a higher risk of heart disease, diabetes, cancer and death regardless of regular exercise.

The study, which was published in the *Annals of Internal Medicine*, reviewed 47 other studies that asked people how much time they spent sitting and exercising, as well as rates of heart disease, diabetes, cancer and death from any cause.

The more hours people in the studies spent sedentary like watching TV or reclining on a couch the higher their risk of all of these negative outcomes. Specifically, heavy sitters showed:

- A 90% higher risk of developing diabetes than those who sat less
- An 18% higher chance of dying of heart disease or cancer
- 24% greater odds of dying from any cause.

These rates were the average among people who both exercised regularly and those who did not. But the researchers found that the negative health effects of prolonged sitting are more obvious among those who do little or no exercise than those who do more exercise.

'More than one half of an average person's day is spent being sedentary sitting, watching television, or working at a computer,' says Dr. David Alter, Senior Scientist, Toronto Rehabilitation Institute, University Health Network (UHN), and Institute for Clinical Evaluative Sciences.

'Our study finds that despite the health-enhancing benefits of physical activity, this alone may not be enough to reduce the risk for disease.'

'Avoiding sedentary time and getting regular exercise are both important for improving your health and survival,' says Dr. Alter. 'It is not good enough to exercise for 30 minutes a day and be sedentary for 23 and half hours.'

Dr. Alter says people should aim to decrease sedentary time by two to three hours in a 12-hour day. He recommended that people take these steps to reduce sitting time:

- **Monitor sitting times** 'once you start counting, you're more likely to change your behaviour.
- **Set achievable goals** ' find opportunities to incorporate greater physical activity, and less time sitting, into your daily life. For example, at work, stand up or move for one to three minutes every half hour. And when watching television, stand or exercise during commercials.

Employers can encourage workers to exercise and move at work by:

- Downloading this infographic of exercises for office workers to do during the day.
- Giving workers time off to exercise. For example, enable them to take an additional 30 minutes on top of their normal lunch break and be flexible about when they take this time during the day.
- Coordinating a lunchtime walk for workers encouraging them to leave the workplace and get some exercise.