



CONTACT:

Susan Harris-Broomfield
Nebraska Extension Educator
Rural Health, Wellness, & Safety
308-832-0645

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Just MOVE!

Word is out that sitting all day is one of the worst things we can do to our bodies, and we sit a lot. Even for those of us who religiously exercise on a regular basis, it is nearly impossible to overcome the damage done by sitting all day. Research has shown that sitting for prolonged periods is not good for our heart health and makes us more prone to all kinds of ailments like type 2 diabetes, cancer, and even dementia.

The American Heart Association's minimum recommended physical activity is a moderate activity like fast walking for at least 30 minutes a day, five days a week, plus a muscle-strengthening activity like yoga at least two days a week. In addition, for lowering blood pressure, it is recommended that we average 40 minutes of moderate to vigorous activity, like bike riding, three or four days a week. What the recommendation does not address is whether you are sitting the rest of the day. Recent studies point to evidence that even **exercising one hour a day does not counteract the negative effects of sitting for hours.**

The good news is that small efforts can lead to better health. Just move a little! Smaller amounts of movement each day are more beneficial than trying to fit in lots of exercise in fewer days. Did you know that standing burns twice as many calories as sitting? Here are some ideas to get you out of your chair:

- Set a reminder to let you know to move every half-hour (some activity-monitoring wristbands can be configured to do that for you)
- Make each television commercial your cue to stand and do some stretching until your show is on
- Find things you normally do while sitting that can be accomplished in a standing position

Even while *in* your chair, there are things to activate muscles in your body:

- Squeeze your buttock muscles together and hold
- Do chair push-ups by holding onto armrests and lifting yourself up as high as possible
- Extend one leg straight out, point and flex foot, touch toe to the floor, extend again

While standing and doing a task in the kitchen, workshop, or while talking on the phone, try these:

- Stand on one leg
- Lift leg slowly to the side, keeping it straight, and putting it back to the floor; then lift to the back
- Rise to the balls of your feet, then put heels back on the floor, rise again, holding if able

Instead of sitting, lie on the floor while watching television:

- Lift legs to be straight up, point and flex feet; stretch arms toward the ceiling as well
- Lift legs to be straight up, form a “V” with legs, slowly bring back to straight position
- Lift legs to be straight up, allow one to go slowly down to the floor, bring back up to meet the other

Move slowly with all of these, try working your way up to more and more repeats, and talk to your doctor about any activities you begin.

Other ideas:

- When starting to sit in your chair, pause halfway down and hold before sitting
- There is no rule that says you must sit on bleachers to watch sporting events...find a place to stand and stretch
- Always, ALWAYS take regular breaks from sitting, whether you are in a vehicle or tractor, at a desk, or on the sofa

If you do not even like to *think* about exercise, think in terms of activity! Many of us will never talk about “working out” – ugh. However, maybe we would consider enjoying some activities that make our bodies feel great while monitoring sitting time. There are even apps out there that donate money to your favorite charity for every step you move. What great incentive!

For more information about the dangers of sitting, visit the American Academy of Family Physicians at aafp.org or visit mayoclinic.org.