

Is Sitting the New Smoking?

Are prolonged periods of sitting putting you at increased risk for disease and early death?

Many of us spend six to eight hours a day sitting at work, after which we go home and sit in front of the television. While this may seem harmless, recent research has shown that sitting for long periods of time may increase your risk of developing a number of chronic diseases, like diabetes, cardiovascular disease, certain cancers, and even psychological conditions like depression.

Potential Risks

Sitting for an extended period of time can cause your body to slow down many of the metabolic processes that burn calories.

Recent studies have found a number of negative health effects associated with sitting for long periods:

- Metabolism slows down--burning only one to two calories per minute
- Blood circulation slows
- The body uses less blood sugar and burns less fat, which, in the long term, can result in insulin resistance
- After sitting for two hours, good cholesterol levels can drop and levels of bad cholesterol can increase
- After sitting down all day, the efficiency of insulin drops

Studies have even shown that regular prolonged periods of sitting can increase your risk of premature death.

What is the Antidote?

Get up and get moving. The human body functions best when it's in motion. Here are a few tips to help you be more active.

- Stand up and take a break. Even a minute of physical activity can reinvigorate your muscles, increase the efficiency of your metabolism, and increase blood flow to your limbs.
- If possible, try to get a "standing desk" (as approved by OSHA) for your office or cubicle.
- Try to get up from your desk every hour or so and take a lap around your office.



- If you need to sit for long periods of time, try to get a chair that will encourage "active" or "dynamic" sitting. This type of sitting allows you to engage in adequate amounts of functional movement and helps to prevent the physical discomfort and potential bodily harm that may take place due to prolonged "static" sitting.

Take good care of your body by moving frequently and avoiding long periods of inactivity—at your desk or at home. The body was made to move, so let it. □



Functional Fitness Training

Could training for real-life situations make a difference for you?

Unlike some training that focuses on sets of limited movements—like a biceps curl, for example—functional fitness training incorporates movements used in sports or real-life situations to target a number of muscle groups at once.

Functional fitness training consists of exercises that are designed to train your muscles and your body to perform everyday activities (lifting, carrying, throwing a ball, pushing something across the room, etc.) in an easier, safer, and more optimal fashion.

Squat to dumbbell press >

1. Stand with a dumbbell in each of your hands, with your palms and elbows facing out
2. Hold the dumbbells at chest level.
3. Squat as low as you can.
4. As you come up, press the weights over your head. Hold this position for a second, then slowly return to the starting position.
5. Repeat.



Stair-climb with biceps curl >

1. Stand at the bottom of a flight of stairs, while holding a dumbbell in each hand.
2. Carefully climb the stairs while performing biceps curls.
3. Walk back down the stairs and briefly rest before your next set.
4. Repeat.



Knee lift with lateral raise >

1. Stand up straight with a dumbbell in each hand and your arms at your sides.
2. Lift your right knee until it reaches hip level. Simultaneously, lift your arms straight out to your sides and form a "T" at your shoulders.
3. Hold this pose for 2 seconds, and make sure that your navel is pulled back towards your spine.
4. Lower your leg to the starting position.
5. Repeat on the other side.



Overhead lift with lateral twist >

1. Stand up straight with a dumbbell in each hand and your arms at your sides.
2. Twist and reach to your right, as if you were going to place the dumbbells on a high shelf.
3. Make sure that your abdominal muscles are contracted throughout the pose (pulling the navel back towards your spine).
4. Carefully lower the dumbbells to the starting position.
5. Repeat on the other side.



Keeping Focused in a Distracting World

We all have days where we find it hard to focus—we daydream, “zone out,” or get distracted. However, don’t feel bad. This happens to all of us—more often than one might expect.

Staying focused, however, can help us accomplish more in a given day and stay on task. Here are some tips to help you fine-tune your focus:

Meditate – Various studies have shown that meditating on a regular basis has a number of health benefits, including:

- Reducing stress
- Lowering blood pressure
- Improving memory, concentration, and quality of sleep

Clean up your act – Keep your workspace organized and remove any items that may sidetrack you. A well-organized workspace can also increase productivity and reduce time wasted digging for items.

Steer clear of distractions – Limit your Internet, smart phone, and television use during work hours and stay away from personal email, social media, and games. If you have difficulty resisting temptation, there are various applications that can block specific programs to minimize your use during designated work times.

Make a list – While it may seem cliché, “to-do” lists are a good way to keep you focused.

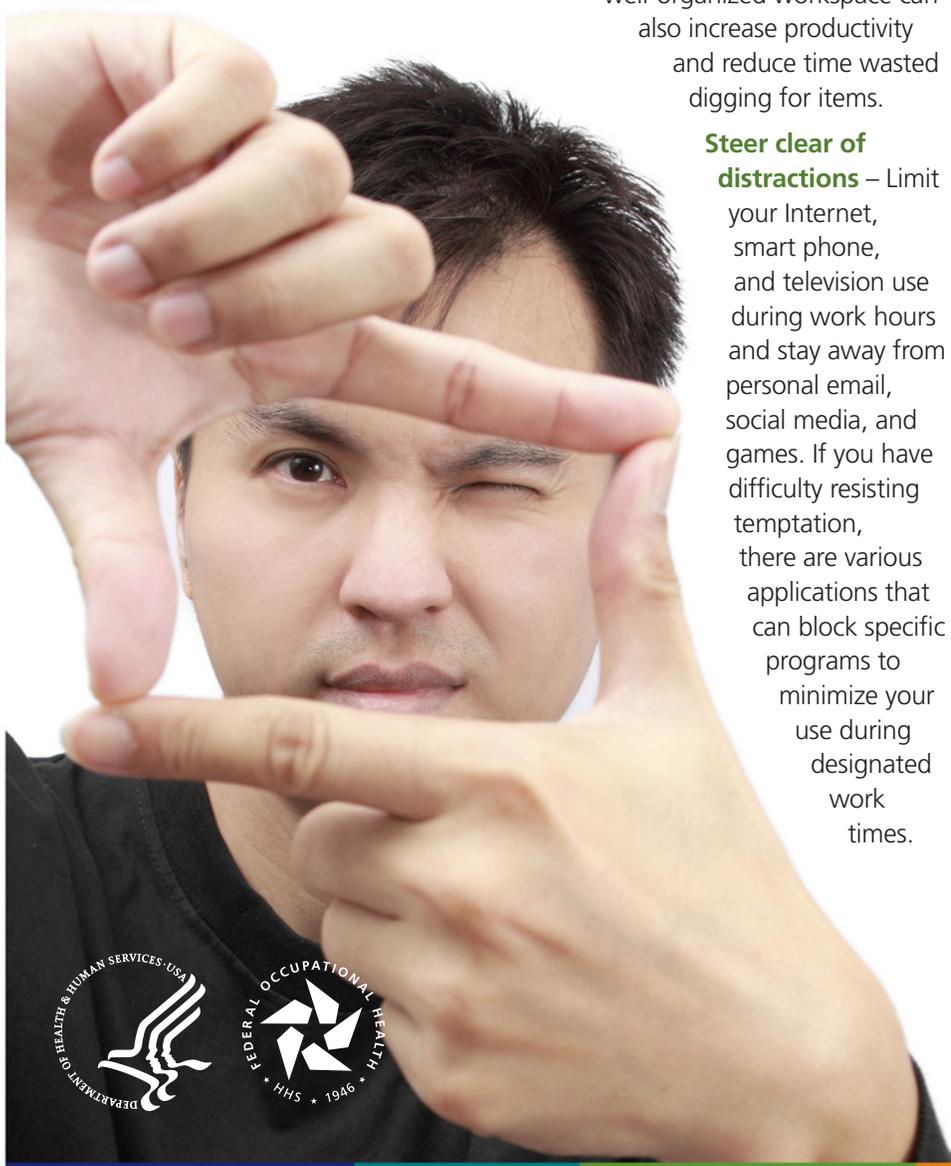
- Make yourself a list at the beginning of every day, week, or month
- Divide and conquer. Break down projects into discrete steps or tasks.
- When listing tasks, include deadlines and due dates.
- Prioritize your tasks, listing the hardest and more important ones first.
- Cross off assignments once they have been completed.

Avoid procrastinating – Don’t put things off till tomorrow, next week, or next month. Focus on the present and manage the task(s) at hand. A good rule of thumb is, “if it takes two minutes or less, do it right then.” That way, small to-do items don’t add up and overtake the larger projects you aim to complete.

Take breaks – To keep your mind fresh and focused, take breaks after long periods of concentration.

- Aim for a short break every hour or a 2-minute break once every half hour. You can set a timer to remind you that you should take a breather.
- During your break, do something different. Get up, look out the window, talk to a colleague, take a short walk outside, or grab some coffee.

Staying focused and on task is a great way to get things down and do a good job. □





Going Mediterranean

The Mediterranean diet provides an easy and tasty way to live a healthier life.

The Mediterranean region has long been associated with light, healthy eating and good living. The ideal Mediterranean meal is naturally heart-healthy—rich in fruits and vegetables, whole grains, vegetable oils, and lean protein sources such as seafood, and plant-based protein like legumes and nuts.

Reap the benefits

Various studies have shown that the Mediterranean diet has a number of health benefits:

- Reduces the risk of chronic diseases – such as heart and vascular diseases, type 2 diabetes, certain types of cancer, Alzheimer’s disease, cognitive decline, and Parkinson’s disease
- Can help reduce cholesterol and lower blood pressure
- Can help achieve or maintain a healthy body weight

How to Get Started

With just a few adjustments, your meals can be more Mediterranean-friendly:

- Learn to love your veggies.
 - Red pepper, spinach, arugula, broccoli, tomatoes, kale, and avocados (just to name a few) are healthy and tasty ways to add color and nutrients to your diet
 - Try simple dishes that feature vegetables as the main focus, such as sliced tomatoes with olive oil and feta cheese or a pizza with fresh peppers and mushrooms

- Enjoy more whole grains: Brown rice, quinoa, whole grain breads, and pastas
- Include more fruits in your diet: Use fruit to make a salad more colorful or to end your meal with something fruity and sweet
- Go nuts: Nuts and seeds can be an alternative source for protein, fiber, and heart-healthy fats. Add them to salads or toss them with roasted veggies. Use them sparingly, though; they tend to be high in fat
- Choose lean proteins: Seafood, low-fat dairy, and plant-based proteins; like beans, peas, nuts, and soy products
- Use “good” fats: Extra-virgin olive oil, nuts, sunflower seeds, and avocados are all great sources of healthy fats. These “good” fats are essential for healthy cells, proper nerve activity, vitamin absorption, and immune system function

Additional tips

- If you drink wine, enjoy it in moderation: no more than one glass per day for women and no more than two glasses per day for men
- Cut down on sweets and sugars
- Avoid getting too much salt, especially if you have high blood pressure

In addition to a lighter, more plant-based diet, the Mediterranean lifestyle is also known for its more relaxed and family-oriented way of looking at the world. Maybe we should be adopting that, too. □