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**REASONS
WHY
SITTING
TOO MUCH
WILL KILL
YOU**

Introduction – Why Sitting Too Much Is a Bad Thing

If you take a look around, it is very likely that you will see almost every other person just sitting their life away. That's right- sitting their life away. The expression is not just a saying but actually means something. For starters, it tells us that too much sitting is definitely not a good thing to do. In fact, a sedentary lifestyle where physical movement has become seriously restricted can lead to nothing good.

But before we move on, let us take a good look at what sedentary means. By way of definition, a sedentary lifestyle is one where there is a lot of sitting and lying down with very little or no exercise. Some experts even consider this type of chronic sitting as deadly as smoking. Apart from stating the obvious that a sedentary lifestyle will obviously bring forth issues like poor health and weight gain, there is a whole plethora of other aspects of sitting down for prolonged periods that can not only be detrimental to health but actually speed up mortality.



It is hard to divide up the reasons of why sedentary behaviors are so bad for health, since many of the reasons are all intertwined. For instance, being sedentary aids weight gain, which in turn affects overall health in a number of ways. Or, an inactive lifestyle slows metabolism which can also lead to a number of health hazards. Likewise, sedentary lifestyles have also been associated with poor mental health, another factor that can set off debilitating health symptoms and impair good health.

So while many of the reasons behind too much sitting being detrimental to good health are all connected, we will attempt to look at the most prominent of these separately and establish how they may actually be taking down your health bit by bit.

Reason # 1

Linked to weight gain and metabolic syndrome

Perhaps the most noticeable result of too much sitting is weight gain. This is because externally weight gain is easily visible showing both on the body, as well as the way your clothes fit. It is there for everyone to see and you can no longer blame the camera for putting on those extra pounds.

Internally, however, weight gain does a lot more damage than simply make your clothes fit tighter. This stands especially true for individuals going through middle age as during this time, the proportion of fat to body weight tends to increase. And for the most part, the extra pounds like to park themselves around the mid-section. Throw a sedentary lifestyle into the mix and it becomes a recipe for disaster.

There are two types of fat that lead to unwanted weight gain. The first, known as subcutaneous fat can also go by the name of “muffin top” as this type of fat is easy to grasp with your hands. The second type, called visceral fat is invisible and lies deep within the abdominal cavity. Not only does visceral fat lie out of reach coating internal organs, it has also been linked to various metabolic disturbances and an increased risk for cardiovascular disease and type 2 diabetes. In women, the same has also been linked with breast cancer.

Of the two, subcutaneous, or pinchable fat can be very hard to get rid of but is often not considered a serious health threat in otherwise normal weight individuals. Visceral fat, on the other hand, is the more dangerous one and needs to be kept in check to prevent health from deteriorating. Both can happen as a result of leading a sedentary lifestyle that involves too much sitting.

Having said that, the good news is that both can also be targeted with exercise and an active lifestyle. And pairing this up with a healthy diet will multiply the benefits. As an added bonus, visceral fat responds really well to exercise and diet and offers benefits like lower blood pressure and favorable cholesterol levels.

In this sense, the effect of movement, even leisurely movement can be significant. With regard to weight management, moving about helps burn extra calories which can promote weight loss and increased energy. On average, a person can burn 30% more calories when standing than sitting. And while it is not huge amount, it can add up over time and contribute to weight loss.

Even better, the muscle activity involved in standing seems to bring about important processes affecting the breakdown of sugars and fats within the body. While sitting, these processes are stalled and associated health risks increase. But when standing or moving about, the processes are kicked back into action.

Linked to metabolic syndrome

Closely related to weight gain due to a sedentary lifestyle is metabolic syndrome. The condition is found worldwide with its prevalence directly related to physical activity, race and lifestyle. It is one of the most widely used markers of cardio metabolic risk including high blood pressure, elevated cholesterol and abdominal obesity. In turn these can become precursors for developing heart disease and type 2 diabetes.

A slow metabolism has been linked to many things before. Typical offenders include eating too few calories, skimping on protein, not getting enough high quality sleep and a lack of resistance training to name a few. Plus, who doesn't know that age has a part to play in as well. But now new evidence also suggests that sitting down for long periods is as guilty of slowing down metabolism as any of the other reasons.



Excessive sitting slows the metabolism, burning approximately 50 fewer calories per hour than standing. This significantly impacts the body's ability to regulate blood sugar level, blood pressure and metabolize fat. In addition the same can also cause weaker bones and muscles. Muscles burn less fat and blood flow becomes sluggish allowing fatty acids to clog arteries more easily. A slow metabolism has been linked to weight gain, diabetes, obesity heart disease and even death.

Reason # 2

Linked to chronic diseases

Contemporary life is all about sitting down. We sit at work, sit when we drive and then come home and sit some more. Such ease could easily come at the expense of longevity as sitting for long stretches of time increases the odds of an untimely death.

Until recently, prevention of chronic diseases included, lowering cholesterol, refraining from smoking, reducing blood pressure and engaging in moderate exercise. But more and more studies are now pointing fingers at another culprit in the equation; the amount of time an individual spends sitting. Sedentary behavior is closely associated with an increased risk of developing chronic conditions such as type 2 diabetes, heart disease and even some kinds of cancers.

Much of this sedentary behavior comes from contemporary changes in transportation, occupations, domestic tasks and leisure activities such as screen time. A large percentage of these daily activities are about sitting which involves low energy expenditure. Historically, the first study on sitting vs standing was done in the 1950s and compared bus drivers in London to their more physically active coworkers, the conductors. Results revealed that the non-sedentary coworkers displayed lower rates of heart disease and were less prone to unwanted weight gain.

The number of chronic diseases also increases in direct proportion to the duration of sitting times. The problem caused by such inactivity is that sitting stops the circulation of lipase. This is an enzyme that absorbs fat and assists in the breakdown of dietary fats into smaller molecules called fatty acids and glycerol. With lipase inertia, fat does not get burnt by muscles readily, but recirculates back into the bloodstream.

This inactivity further assists in storing fat deposits as body fat which can eventually lead to clogging arteries and triggering various diseases. On the other hand, even the simplest of activities such as standing up as opposed to sitting involves muscle participation and assists the body process cholesterol and fat in a positive manner. According to the World Health Organization physical inactivity can bring about more than 25 % of cases of breast and colon cancers, 27% of diabetes and 30% of heart disease.

Cardiovascular disease

Cardiovascular diseases do not occur overnight but are actually a group of conditions related to heart health that develop over a period of time. In other words, the term 'cardiovascular disease' is applied to long term conditions in which the heart cannot effectively pump blood throughout the body. Many people live with these conditions, being unaware of them until they cause a problem.

The risk is increased manifold when individuals also maintain a sedentary lifestyle at the same time. While many of these conditions can be kept under control with medications, the absence of a healthy lifestyle may even prevent medications from doing their part. That is why both diet and exercise are recommended to encourage individuals when reducing their risk of heart problems. A recently issued science advisory from the American Heart association establishes the link between too much sitting and the increased risk of cardiovascular disease.

Diabetes type 2

Sitting for long periods can elevate blood glucose levels. A 2012 study conducted in Australia required diabetic participants to sit for an extended period of 5 hours without break on the first day. On the second day, the same participants took a 2 minute break by pacing gently on the treadmill after every 20 minutes of sitting. And on the third, they walked at a moderate pace for 2 minutes after 20 minutes of sitting down.



Results of the study revealed that when participants walked in between sitting periods, there was a 30% improvement in the individual's response to meals. This indicates that the body is better able to metabolize food when there are regular bouts of movement in an otherwise sedentary period.

Similar results were also observed in another study where obese participants sat in one long session of uninterrupted sitting and another interspersed with 5 minutes of seated arm ergometry every 30 minutes. When results of the two sessions were compared, the session with the arm ergometry showed improved blood glucose levels. So, even sitting down and engaging in short bouts of movement can be beneficial for keeping blood glucose levels in check.

Cancer

Studies have also linked prolonged sitting to a greater risk of developing colon, breast and endometrial cancers. The American Institute for Cancer Research presented estimates of 49,000 cases of breast cancer and 43,000 cases of colon cancer to be linked to a lack of physical activity. The statistics are not limited to individuals who sit for prolonged periods only, but also include others who exercise daily and spend a large portion of their day sitting about.

Such cancer association with a sedentary lifestyle may be linked to insulin resistance, inflammation levels and body fat among other factors. Most of these key biological indicators of cancer risk can be countered by everyday practices like a daily brisk walk or some other aerobic exercise. Based on these research findings, the AICR recommends making time for physical activity and taking a break of a few minutes after every hour of sitting.

Reason # 3

Linked to Musculoskeletal Issues

A lot of muscle and bone degeneration can happen when a person keeps sitting for a long time. For instance, you may start to suffer from mushy abs if you keep sitting for a long time during the day. This happens because when a person stands up, or even sits up straight, their abdominal muscles keep them upright. However, when the same person slumps in a seated position, the very same muscles go unused. The seated position also puts huge stress on the back muscles, neck, and spine. The whole scenario becomes worse if the individual slouches as well.

The resulting tight muscles and flabby abs from bad posture can damage the spine's natural arch and lead to a condition known as hyperlordosis or swayback. If most of the sitting happens at a desk at work, then craning the neck forward or holding the phone in a cradle can strain the cervical vertebrae and lead to permanent imbalances. In this position, it is not the neck alone which slouches, but slumping forward also overextends the shoulder and back muscles as well.

Moving on, flexible hips can help maintain balance when sitting, but incessant sitters hardly ever stretch the hip flexors and they become tight and short. This results in limiting the individual's stride length and range of motion. Plus, reduced hip mobility can then easily become a primary reason

for falls in advanced age. So while muscles suffer in one sense, bones do so in another. When people keep themselves seated for a long time, bones also become inactive. On the contrary, activities like running and walking prompt hip and lower body bones to grow stronger, thicker, and denser. Otherwise, inactivity can cause bones to become soft and lead to serious conditions like osteoporosis.

Throw in poor or slowed circulation from prolonged sitting in the mix, and it results in fluid to collect in the legs. The problems of impaired circulation can result in swollen ankles, varicose veins and deep vein thrombosis to name a few. Of these varicose veins are enlarged veins and can cause aching, pain and discomfort for some people. In the least severe cases, this does not present a problem but prolonged cases of varicose veins may indicate a higher risk of other circulatory problems.

Deep vein thrombosis (DVT) is a clot that forms in the leg, often because people sit still for too long. It can be serious if the clot breaks free and lodges in the lung. Some people might notice swelling and pain, but others have no symptoms at all. That's why it is a good idea to break up long sitting sessions.

Reason # 4

Linked to Brain Drain

If a person sits too much, their brain could look just like that of someone with dementia. One possible reason for this could be because muscles in motion pump oxygen and blood through the brain. But when an individual remains seated everything slows down, including the brain. Just as the rest of the body, the brain also relies on uninterrupted blood flow and oxygenation as well as glucose metabolism to function optimally.

Anxiety and depression

The connection between sitting for long periods and anxiety and depression are perhaps lesser understood than the physical effects of sitting. However, there remains a connection as people who follow a sedentary lifestyle are also at a higher risk of developing anxiety and depression.

The obvious connection in this regard could be the absence of the mental benefits of fitness when a person spends most of their time sitting down rather than moving. Studies also show that less time spent sitting correlates better to psychological wellbeing and better health related quality of life. At the same time more sitting time is associated with depressive symptoms.

Some studies have found that the more time an individual spends in sedentary behavior, the more likely they are to have anxiety. Certain sedentary behaviors may also be specifically harmful to mental health. Video gaming, for instance, can activate central nervous system and elevate anxiety levels. Screen based activities may also disrupt sleep, which often leads to anxiety. As such, reasons for linking mental health and a sedentary lifestyle could be disturbances in sleep patterns, social withdrawal and poor metabolic health.

While sleep disturbances can easily fog the brain, the social withdrawal theory purports that prolonged sedentary behavior like such as screen time can lead to withdrawal from social relationships. This feature in itself has been linked to increased anxiety. Researchers reviewed nine separate studies that took an in depth look at anxiety as it related to total sitting time for low energy activities like watching TV and playing electronic games. Of these, seven studies included adult participants while the other two included children and teenagers.

The result of these studies established a link between sedentary lifestyles and increased anxiety in five of the nine studies. The total amount of sitting time also seemed to factor in four of the nine studies. Another study done on employees who sat for long stretches at work presents equally alarming results. The data was collected from 3,367 government employees which revealed that occupational sitting and moderate levels of psychological distress were prevalent in most participants. The results also yielded the possibility of offering mental health benefits by reducing occupational sitting time. Interestingly enough, the same study also indicated that going to the gym after

work did not protect the workers from the negative effects of sitting. Even when people sat for most of their work day and remained physically active in their time off, they still demonstrated higher rates of anxiety and depression than others who sat for lesser hours.

Reason # 5

Linked to Organ Damage

As a result of prolonged periods of sitting, important organs of the body get impacted in different ways. Here is a quick look at what happens to different internal organs when subjected to long periods of inactivity.

Heart

For instance, muscles burn less fat and blood starts to flow more sluggishly when an individual sits for a long time. This inactivity also makes it easier for fatty acids to clog the heart. As a result, prolonged sitting has been associated with increased cholesterol levels as well as high blood pressure. Consequently, individuals with a more sedentary lifestyle are more susceptible to developing cardiovascular diseases than others who make regular movement a part of their daily life.

Pancreas

A mention of the pancreas is also very important as this organ produces insulin. Insulin carries glucose to the cells for energy. However, when the body remains in a sedentary state for a long time, the cells in idle muscles do not respond as readily to insulin. This results in the pancreas producing too much insulin and becoming a precursor to diabetes.

Kidneys

While sitting for long periods of time is never recommended in any scenario, it can become especially important for people at a higher risk for developing kidney disease.

This is because as new evidence unfolds, research indicates that sitting for prolonged periods may elevate the risk factor for chronic kidney disease particularly in women. Women who sat for less than 3 hours every day were found to be 30% less likely to acquire chronic kidney disease than others who stated spending more than 8 hours of sitting time daily.

Reason # 6

Linked to increased mobility disability in advanced age

Sedentary individuals are more likely to develop age related disabilities as they advance in age. The likelihood of this increases coming from a life of inactivity or a setting where only moderate activity is pursued. Older adults who may have lead relatively sedentary lives can be seen as having trouble with simple tasks like dressing and eating. Some may also report as having problems with routines like getting in and out of bed, walking or others that impact personal independence.

A 2014 study, the first of its kind, explored how sedentary behavior became its own risk factor for disability in individuals over 60 years of age. The study evaluated the exercise habits of more than 2,000 subjects aged 60 and above. The focus of the study was to assess the subjects' ability to perform everyday activities.

Results reveled that regardless of their level of activity, if the individuals spent most of their day being sedentary, they were also more likely to be disabled in certain capacities. On average subjects spent about nine hours daily being sedentary during waking hours. Of these, about four percent reported being disabled, with disability being defined as having problems or facing an inability in performing everyday tasks.

The study also found that just one additional hour spent sitting each day considerably increased the risk of disabilities. And like the results from some other studies, this also indicated that the effects of sitting for prolonged periods did not seem to be offset by regular visits to the gym.

As a takeaway, being sedentary was not just a synonym for being inactive in this case. If anything, prolonged periods of sitting around still ended up hindering simple everyday activities for these older adults. Just like any other age group, older adults also need to limit the time they spend sitting. Another study explored the same phenomenon of linking sedentary time and physical activity with mobility disability in older age.

The study followed subjects over a period of ten years where their sedentary behavior including watching TV was monitored. Results revealed that those who engaged in increased television watching for 5 or more hours every day were as astounding 65 % more likely to have a walking disability 10 years down the road. Others who watched TV for 2 hours or less every day were less likely to develop this disability.

As a result, high levels of total sitting time combined with 3 or less hours of weekly physical activity had a particularly negative effect on older adults. Together, these sedentary practices significantly increased the risk of a mobility disability.

Reason #7

Undoes the effects of exercise

So far, the entire focus of canceling out sedentary behavior is to sit less and move more. More specifically, engage in some kind of exercise so that muscles and joints are kept in motion and do not get impaired by sitting idle. Having said that, it has also been established that exercise is not necessarily an antidote for too much sitting. While it is highly beneficial, people also need to figure out a way to limit sedentary time.

The effects of too much sitting are hard to counter with exercise alone. Even if people work out every day of the week, far above the suggested 2-3 hours, they still cannot reverse the effects of sitting 7 hours at a time. In fact, even something as little as sitting down for two hours can erase the health benefits achieved from 20 minutes of exercise. Exercise will definitely blunt the effect of too much sitting, but not completely.

In terms of numbers, people who spend time sitting for about 8 hours a day but are otherwise physically active have a much lower risk of death when compared to others who sat for a shorter duration but were not necessarily physically active. This should drive home the importance of physical activity, no matter how many hours a day an individual sits.

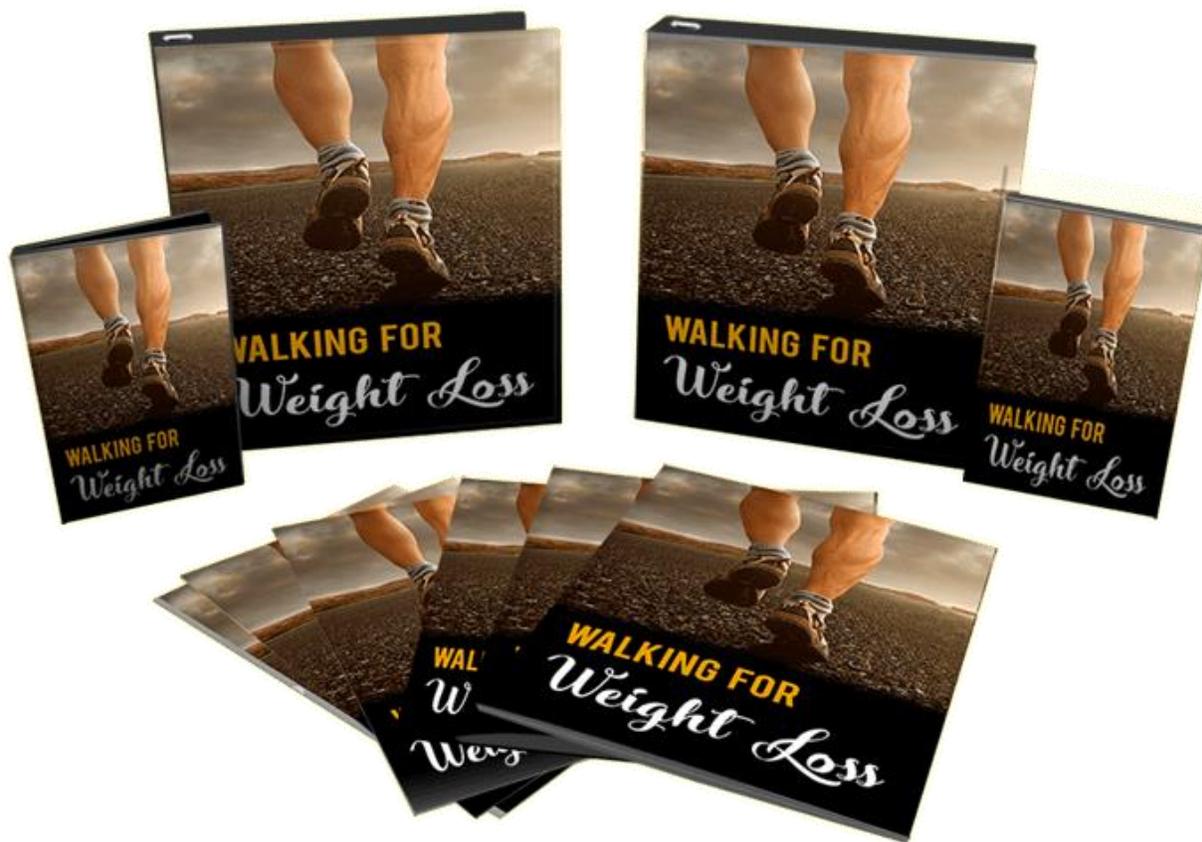
Conclusion

Simply sitting down is only part of the problem. It's how an individual sits is what may be aggravating the problem. For instance, a physical therapist observes that when a person sits in a chair too long, they turn into the chair. Since no movement occurs while seated, organs tend to slump out of their best position and can lead to developing aches, pains and stiffness.

On the other hand, sitting with good posture may improve the situation somewhat. Yet, it is still crucial that sitting periods be broken up by short bouts of activity. Most experts recommend taking a break from sitting every hour. The recommendation is to get up and walk around for five minutes before lounging back into the chair once more.

And even when sitting, try to shift positions every fifteen minutes or so to keep mobility in motion. Just remember that the human body was in fact designed to move to work at its best. And anything short of that much needed movement will put it at risk and impair its performance in many different ways.

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