

The sedentary lifestyle. A health risk

Being sedentary is when a person spends a lot of time seated, reclined or laying down when they're awake.

In the last few years, the number of hours we spend in sedentary activities, in all aspects of our lives, has increased: we use a motor vehicle, at work we are either seated in an office or in front of a computer, we spend our leisure time in front of screens (television, phone, computer, tablets, videogame consoles, etc.) or reading. People are seated between 5 and 8 hours a day.

What risks does this have?

In adults, a sedentary lifestyle is associated with overall higher mortality rates, more cardiovascular disease, some types of cancer, adult diabetes, metabolic syndrome and other cardiovascular risk factors, musculoskeletal problems, lower productivity, decreased well-being and higher anxiety and depression.

Being sedentary for 7 or more hours a day increases these risks. The health risk of this lifestyle is equal to that of not doing enough physical exercise in your free time.

If I do physical activity or exercise during my free time will I avoid these risks?

It is very healthy and recommended to do physical activity or exercise during your free time, however, it does not eliminate the risks of a sedentary lifestyle, it only mitigates them.



What can I do?

Everyone will benefit from an increase in their physical activity and a reduction in sedentary behaviors, including pregnant women and people with chronic illnesses or disabilities.

You can include physical activity into your work, during your commute, and in daily tasks and chores. All types of activities count:

1. While you're awake, avoid staying seated for more than 7 hours per day, ideally less than 4 hours is best. Change a sedentary time in your day for one with physical activity of any intensity level (even if it is a low level).
2. Reduce screentime (television, computer, phone) unless you're on the move. Calculate the time spent on these activities and reduce it gradually.
3. Always use stairs when possible and not the elevator or escalator.
4. Try to get to places by foot, using a bicycle or another means of active movement.
5. While on public transportation you can let others sit down first and you can also get off one stop prior to your destination. If you're using a car, you can park further away and walk more.
6. When you are seated, either at home or at work, get up every 30 minutes and walk around for a few minutes or do a physical activity. Get up and stretch your legs, go drink water or go to the bathroom, etc. Set reminders in your phone to get up.
7. If you are unable to walk or stand, try to lift your knees while seated, stretch your feet, move your arms. All forms of activity count!
8. On the phone? Get up or walk around while you talk.
9. Try having meetings while standing or walking around when you do not have to write.
10. At work, if your colleagues are in the same building, then get up and go talk with them instead of sending an e-mail or instant message.