

prevent

STAND UP FOR health

Story | ANGELA AMBROSE

Sitting for hours at a time can cut years off your life and increase your risk for a number of chronic diseases, says Dr. Michael Jensen,

endocrinologist and researcher at Mayo Clinic, who has been involved in sedentary behavior research for more than a decade.

A plethora of studies have concluded that sitting for too long can endanger your health. For example, an American Cancer Society study showed that sitting for more than six hours per day increased a woman's risk of dying sometime during the next 14 years by 37 percent, and a man's risk by 18 percent, compared with those who sat fewer than three hours per day.

Another study conducted by the University College London found that people who spent four or more hours each day sitting in front of a TV or computer screen more than doubled their risk of having a heart attack or other cardiac problem, compared with those who limited their screen time to two hours or less. They also had a 48 percent higher risk of dying during the four-year study period. These studies support a growing body of research that sitting for prolonged periods is harmful to your health.

"Sitting too much, as a baseline, predisposes you to gaining fat weight. In addition to that, it's going to make you more likely to get diabetes, high blood pressure and abnormal blood fat," Jensen says. "Those chronic diseases take years off your life."

With so much time spent driving, working at a desk or computer, and reclining in front of the TV, the average adult sits for more than half a day. This sedentary lifestyle and the related health risks have become so prevalent that researchers are now calling it "sitting disease."

A study from the American Institute for Cancer Research suggests that you can reduce your risk of colon or breast cancer by simply taking one- or two-minute "activity" breaks every hour, in addition to exercising regularly. According to researchers, this could prevent an estimated 100,000 cases of cancer annually.

One of the most surprising findings is that even the most avid exercisers experience the harmful effects of sitting too long.

"Thirty minutes or even an hour in the gym is definitely not enough," Jensen says. To maintain good health, he advises his patients to take 10,000 steps a day, the equivalent of walking 5 miles, by breaking up big blocks of idle time with spontaneous movement and by gradually increasing their level of physical activity. Adults in the U.S. generally average only 3,000 to 5,000 steps per day.

The simple act of standing up and walking even a few steps can increase blood flow, activate your muscles and rev up your metabolism.

"Even if you're just watching TV, get up and move around," Jensen says. "There's no rule that says you have to sit to watch TV. As humans, we're built to be moving." ✦

GET UP AND GO

Integrating more movement into your day can help you reap big health benefits. Grace DeSimone, national director of group fitness for Plus One Health Management, offers these tips:

- Set a timer or an electronic calendar to remind you to get up every hour and move around.
- Whenever you talk on the phone or have a teleconference, walk around your office or home.
- Instead of e-mailing or phoning co-workers, walk over to their desks.
- Sit on an exercise ball instead of a chair, so you can activate your core and leg muscles and maintain better posture.
- Consider buying a standing workstation that allows you to adjust the height of the desk for sitting or standing, or invest in a treadmill desk.

"Every little bit of movement counts," DeSimone says. "Take small steps to achieve big results."





move it, MAN!

Men who exercise at least three hours a week at vigorous intensity can cut their risk of heart attacks by as much as 22 percent, according to researchers from the Harvard School of Public Health. The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) has identified heart disease as the No. 1 cause of death among men. Almost half of all men under the age of 65 who suffer heart attacks die within eight years.



CRASH COURSE

Drivers chatting on a cell phone are four times more likely to get in a crash, according to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA). Research shows that talking on a mobile phone—whether it's hand-held or hands-free—delays a driver's reaction time as much as driving drunk with a blood alcohol level of .08 percent, the legal limit for driving under the influence. Texting and driving raises the risks of accidents even more.

If you're taking a road trip this spring, check the state laws before you leave.

Currently, 35 states and the District of Columbia ban all texting and driving, and nine of those states, as well as the District of Columbia, also make it illegal to use hand-held mobile phones behind the wheel.



sleep

YOUR WAY TO SKINNY

Getting more shut eye may help you keep the pounds off, say researchers from St. Luke's International Hospital in Tokyo. According to a study of more than 21,000 healthy adults, those who slept less than five hours per night were more likely to pack on the pounds and become obese than those who slept seven or more hours.

A separate study from Northwestern University shows that night owls tend to consume more calories than those who turn in early, putting them at higher risk for weight gain. The study followed two groups of people: normal sleepers who went to bed, on average, by 12:30 a.m. and woke up at 8 a.m.; and late sleepers who fell asleep around 3:45 a.m. and woke up at 10:45 a.m. Researchers found that those who went to bed late and slept in late ate twice as much fast food, drank more sugary sodas and had fewer fruits and vegetables. Late sleepers consumed an average of 248 more calories per day than the normal sleepers and tended to eat later in the evening, which was the biggest factor in predicting weight gain.

toned down

Customers who bought Reebok toning shoes didn't get the impressive results they were promised. The shoe and apparel company claimed its toning shoes would activate more leg and buttock muscles than walking shoes, giving customers stronger and more shapely hamstrings, glutes and calf muscles. The Federal Trade Commission (FTC) filed charges against Reebok International Ltd. for falsely advertising its line of toning shoes, resulting in the company paying out \$25 million in consumer refunds.

BRAIN MATTER

The benefits of meditation may go far beyond calming the mind and body. A study from the UCLA School of Medicine indicates that meditation may improve the physical structure of the brain. Scientists used magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) to examine connections between brain regions and found that those who meditated regularly had significantly more white-fiber tracts in the brain than those who had no meditation experience. These findings were consistent with a previous UCLA study indicating that long-term meditators had larger brains and more grey matter than those in the control group. Both studies suggest that meditation may reduce age-related brain atrophy.

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