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## Why sitting ruins our health – and how 22 minutes of exercise could help

For many of us, a working day involves spending several hours at a time sitting in front of a computer – and it is having a serious effect on our health. But research suggests that 22 minutes of moderate to vigorous exercise per day may lower the health risks of a sedentary lifestyle.

### Why is sitting so bad for our health?

Centuries ago, a working day meant heading out with spears to hunt for food. Now, we've swapped the hunter-gatherer lifestyle for desk jobs with comfortable chairs. Unfortunately, this sedentary behaviour – spending long periods of time sitting down – can harm our on our health. Doing nothing for a lot of the day raises the risk of [obesity](#), [type 2 diabetes](#) and [cardiovascular disease](#).

It's not known exactly why sitting down for prolonged periods is so bad for us. Research suggests that by not using our muscles as often, the function of our blood vessels might be affected, which can impact [sugar](#) regulation and [blood pressure](#)<sup>1</sup>. One study linked prolonged sitting to a slower metabolism – the process by which the body breaks down and uses energy – and reduced blood flow<sup>2</sup>.

Sitting down all day has also been linked to musculoskeletal disorders, like [backache](#), tight muscles and [joint pain](#)<sup>3</sup>. Hours of sitting can lead to tight hip flexor muscles – the ones at the top of your legs – which can affect your movement and balance, and lead to aches, pains and even falls.

# How to counteract the effects of prolonged sitting

New research published by the British Journal of Sports Medicine has found that engaging in 22 minutes of moderate to vigorous [physical activity](#) per day may reduce your risk of health problems<sup>4</sup>.

A study of a group of 50+ year olds across Norway, Sweden, and the US found that exercising for 22 minutes even benefitted those who were sedentary for 12 or more hours per day.

It's not always possible to go to a [gym](#) class, especially during a busy work day. So what can you do to be more active if you have a sedentary job?

## Go for a walk

Heading out for a brisk [walk](#) on your lunch break is a good way to get moving. Fresh air is invigorating and being around nature can help boost our [mental health](#).

Walk instead of taking the car, or take the stairs rather than a lift.

## Try an exercise video

There are loads of different [exercise](#) videos online, from dance workouts to yoga. Find one that suits your needs, for example, low impact exercise.

## Invest in a standing desk

Some people use standing desks, which can help you burn calories and improve your posture<sup>5</sup>. However, regular activity – like exercising – offers better benefits than replacing prolonged sitting with prolonged standing<sup>2</sup>.

## Have walking meetings

Sitting at a desk or in a stuffy boardroom doesn't always foster creativity and productivity. Holding walking meetings outside – if the weather allows – is a good way to be active, while reaping the stimulating benefits of being [outdoors](#).

## Stand up and move regularly

Whether it's getting a glass of water or a [coffee](#), make sure you stand up, stretch and move around frequently. It can help to set a timer if you find it difficult to remember when you're absorbed in your work.

# How much exercise should you aim for a day?

Adults should do at least 150 minutes of moderate intensity activity a week – like brisk walking, dancing, water aerobics or riding a bike – or 75 minutes of vigorous activity like [running](#) or swimming, according to the current guidelines. It's important to do strengthening activities that work the muscles and to spread exercise evenly over the week.

## Further reading

1. [Daneshmandi et al: Adverse effects of prolonged sitting behaviour on the general health of office workers.](#)
2. [Peddie et al: The effects of prolonged sitting, prolonged standing, and activity breaks on vascular function, and postprandial glucose and insulin responses: A randomised crossover trial.](#)
3. [Baker et al: The short term musculoskeletal and cognitive effects of prolonged sitting during office computer work.](#)
4. [Sagelv et al: Device-measured physical activity, sedentary time, and risk of all-cause mortality: an individual participant data analysis of four prospective cohort studies.](#)
5. [Creasy et al: Energy expenditure during acute periods of sitting, standing, and walking.](#)

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