

Sitting Disease

Don't Sit Down This is Important



We know that repetitive behaviour can cause injuries, but scientists have found that the worst type of repetitive behaviour could be sitting itself.

Any Physiotherapist will tell you that the human body is made to move, but in our modern lives it's hard to avoid sitting. More of our lives are online, our work and entertainment are often done through a screen. Add in the drive to work and you realise we are sitting more now than any other time in history. But why would it be bad for us?

To start with, extended periods without moving regularly causes joints to stiffen a little. Maybe not a lot in just one day but over a long period of time joints begin to lose some of their movement.

Joints need to be able to move freely to stay healthy. This is particularly true in the spine, as the back is made up of many small bones, known as vertebrae. Vertebrae are connected to each other and move through lots of little joints. When one segment is not moving well, the joints around it have to move further to allow normal movement. If this happens with too many segments, the softer structures that restrict movement, called ligaments, are at risk of being damaged. In fact, quite a lot of lower back pain is caused by stiffness of the upper back. When we have hunched posture our thorax is unable to rotate properly and the lower back moves more to compensate, sometimes leading to injury.

The dangers of sitting, however, go further than just bad posture and back pain. Scientists are finding that sitting for extended periods can actually increase your risk of heart disease, obesity, cancer and diabetes. It doesn't seem likely, but when we sit our bodies become very relaxed. Most body systems slow right down, particularly those that break down sugars and almost all muscles become inactive.

It is starting to be understood that sitting for long periods disrupts the normal functions of the body and as such is a major cause of disease. Even worse news is that just going to the gym or for an extended walk once a day doesn't counteract this; it is much more effective to breakup long sessions of sitting by standing or walking for a few minutes. This is not to say that going to the gym is unimportant, it's just that if you sit still for six consecutive hours you don't undo the damage with half an hour exercise later.

There are many simple ways to combat this problem. Standing has been shown to be much better than sitting, so if you have an office job, perhaps go out of your way to stand up as often as possible. Take your phone calls standing up or get up and walk over to colleagues instead of sending an email if you can. One minute of movement every twenty minutes could be enough to keep you in good health. Alternatively, more and more offices are installing stand-up work stations for staff as a healthier option.

Suggested viewing: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aUalnS6HIGo>