

Everybody Who Sits Too Much Please Stand Up

Your sofa and chair are killing you. Who knew, they look so innocent.

A study done on over 90,000 women aged 50-79 was published in the February American Journal of Preventative Medicine and it concluded “there was a linear relationship between greater amounts of sedentary time and mortality risk.”

That’s not a “man bites dog” news flash, but it *is* another nail in the coffin (so to speak). The more hours the women in the study spent sitting at work, driving, lying on the couch watching TV or engaged in other passive pursuits, the greater their odds of dying early from all causes including heart disease and cancer.

That’s bad enough, but even women who exercised regularly risked shortening their lifespan if they just sat around most the day.

Most of us sit each day longer than we sleep. Standing and walking are things we do begrudgingly and as briefly as possible until we can locate somewhere to sit again.

Not coincidentally, after 35 years of desk work, I weigh more right now than at any point in my life. Nobody is going to feel too sorry for me with 187 pounds spread over a 6’3” frame, but I’ve been a fitness nut all my adult life and it’s distressing. I’m at least 10 pounds heavier than I would like to pose for a cover photo shoot for *Skinny Seniors Fitness* magazine.

I think most of us in the neighborhood of 60 years old can relate. Doing and eating the same things that we always have are now making us fatter. Along with everything else, even our metabolisms get less efficient as we grow older.

Since I didn’t really want to exercise more and I couldn’t possibly consider eating less or drinking less wine (horrors!), I finally pulled the trigger on procuring a standing desk for my office. You may have seen them – mine’s a pneumatic version that allows me to sit or stand with the press of a button. Studies show that standing versus sitting during an eight-hour workday can burn an extra 300

calories or so (depending on your weight), which for me equates to about 25 minutes at a brisk pace on an elliptical exercise machine.

In the interest of full disclosure, my company sells standing, sit/stand and treadmill desks. We have done that for years, but only since we registered as a Blue Zones company and formed a wellness committee have we gotten serious about walking the talk.

The best desks are height-adjustable and easy to use - often pneumatic or electric - but they can get expensive. However, you can devise a standing-height work surface by placing cinder blocks under your current desk's legs (if you're not a slave to aesthetics), and an inexpensive drafting stool can serve when you want to take a break from standing.

Oddly perhaps, standing all day has its own health risks (varicose veins, joint damage, swelling). Alternating between the two is the way to go – I've found that I'm happy at about a 75% standing percentage. I deliberately chose an ergonomic leather chair to sit in that doesn't breathe very well, so it gets a little uncomfortable after about 20 minutes which reminds me to stand up again.

Since I began standing most the day, people who walk in my office tend to stand as well. Ten-minute meetings that always used to occur while sitting have turned into five-minute meetings while standing. I no longer feel drowsy after lunch, and I'm much more likely to walk around the office on minor errands if I'm already standing. Comfortable shoes (and/or a cushioned pad) help quite a bit.

Like anything else that's good for you, it takes mental discipline. We are our own worst enemies - when I go to the fitness center to work out, for some reason I still value scoring a parking spot near the front door. So, let's all get up, keep moving, and keep an eye out for those cinder blocks.

Writers Group member Dave Parsons is getting healthier every day at the business he co-owns on the Coralville Strip.