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LET'S TAKE A SHORT WALK

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At office, walk to the cooler to get a glass of water. In the next hour, visit the toilet. When you get a phone call, walk and talk. If there is enough space, you could get several hundred steps for every call you attend — Dr V Mohan, chairman, Dr Mohan's Diabetes Specialities Centre



A study suggests that combining 30 minutes of morning exercise with short walking breaks in a day can help control blood pressure

Children of today spend more time online playing games and attending classes. And for adults, most jobs revolve around the number of hours spent in front of the computer. If sitting is the new smoking, then how do we overcome the problem of contracting metabolic disorders? Use your legs, and start walking, say experts

It's not news that sitting for long hours working, playing online games, and other lifestyle changes has had adverse impact on our health. Obesity, spine-related problems, cardiac issues, diabetes and hypertension are some of the health issues related to low physical activity.

There are several studies to prove that walking, even for a few minutes a day, can vastly improve overall physical and mental health.

Though his increasing weight for the past few years was a cause of concern, Ranjitha was shocked to learn that her son Raghav (16) was pre-diabetic when she took him to a doctor for a routine annual check-up.

But as doctors rightly pointed out, Raghav was not an isolated case. Many children and young adults are at risk of developing health problems, mainly because of sitting for long hours.

The regular sitting hours at school with no participation in any form of physical activity, online tuitions, and video games for long durations have them at a risk of diabetes and other autoimmune and metabolic disorders.

Stretch your legs

Sitting is the new smoking, say health experts. Sitting for prolonged periods has now been scientifically proven to be one of the main causes of obesity, diabetes, hypertension, heart diseases, osteoarthritis, spine problems etc.

“Every hour we need to get up and stretch. Walk about for a couple of minutes. This will relieve the monotony of sitting and immediately provide some relief to you,” says Dr V Mohan, chairman, Dr Mohan’s Diabetes Specialities Centre. “If you work in an office, walk to the cooler to get a glass of water. The next hour, it could be a visit to the toilet and the following hour, you can get up to visit a colleague in another cabin.”

Find as many reasons as possible to get up and walk about a couple of minutes or more. “Another tip I give my patients is that whenever you get a phone call, walk and talk. If there is enough space, you could get several hundred steps for every call you attend,” adds Dr Mohan.

In addition to regular exercises and morning walks, short spells of movement throughout the day will keep you healthy, help you reduce weight and prevent chronic diseases like diabetes. Walking has also been shown to extend the lifespan of an individual, improve quality of sleep and digestion.

There are many electronic devices, apps and alarms to remind you every hour to get up and walk.

Regulate blood pressure

Exercise and breaks in prolonged sitting can reduce blood pressure in senior citizens, overweight and obese adults.

A study published in the journal Hypertension suggests that combining 30 minutes of morning exercise with short walking breaks throughout the day can help control blood pressure.

Sitting for prolonged hours is linked to more cases of hypertension among the elderly. As people age, they hesitate to engage in any major physical activity. Most of their day is spent sitting idle or working while sitting. They must do better weight management on a regular basis by taking breaks while sitting or going on small walks.

Dr Umapathy, head of medical services, Athulya Senior Care, stresses on the importance of maintaining a healthy weight. “Excess weight can contribute to high BP. Regular physical activity such as walking, swimming or yoga can help lower it and promote overall health. Seniors should aim for at least 150 minutes of moderate-intensity aerobic activity per week. A diet rich in fruits, vegetables, whole grains, and lean protein sources can also help lower BP,” explains Dr Umapathy.

Bone-related issues

Sitting for longer periods weakens core strength, loosens muscle and affects a person’s gait.

“The common orthopaedic problems are neck and back stiffness with tightening of muscles.

Many people start slouching forward and sustain that posture permanently with weakening of the core. This leads to obesity, hypertension and diabetes. Since there is less scope of good metabolism in the body people develop high cholesterol. All these risk factors can increase the risk of cardiovascular diseases like heart attack,” explains Dr Rufus Vasanth Raj, head of arthroscopy & sports medicine, Rela Hospital.

Unsurprised that children and young adults (aged 5-17 years) are also affected, he points to the lifestyle that enables children to spend just 90 minutes a day doing physical activities, and over two hours on screen time.

“As they get older, the time spent on screen-based activities grows higher. We should encourage children to play with their age group which also helps in their mental growth,” he adds.

Neurological impact

“Prolonged sitting reduces blood flow and oxygenation to the brain. This can impact neural activity and cognitive function, which in turn affects concentration, ability to focus and process

information. It has also been linked to depression and anxiety,” says Dr Karthick Dhayalan, consultant orthopaedic surgeon, Prashanth Super Speciality Hospital.

Which is why it's important to take frequent breaks and incorporate regular physical activity into your daily routine. This can include stretching, walking, or other forms of exercise that engage the muscles and promote circulation.

It's also important to maintain good posture while sitting and to use ergonomic furniture that offer proper support to the wrist and elbow along with proper alignment of the spine and joints.

Strengthen your heart

Incidence of heart attacks and cardiovascular health problems in the younger population is getting higher. Dr Suresh Rao, consultant cardiologist, MGM Healthcare, says that it's vital to include aerobic exercises as they're helpful in keeping the heart healthy.

“Aerobic and muscle strengthening exercises are different. Aerobics are useful for heart health. Any physical activity improves metabolism and sitting for long hours disrupts that. Obesity can cause diabetes and hypertension. All of this can contribute to the risk of heart-related ailments,” added Dr Suresh.