

- Exercise

Just standing or sleeping are better for your heart health than sitting down, new study finds

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Replacing sitting with just a few minutes of moderate exercise a day can improve your heart health, according to a new study, which found that even light activities such as standing or sleeping were better than sedentary behaviour.

Published in the *European Heart Journal*, the research looked at how different movement impacts heart health during the day.

“It is widely known already that being more active is good for heart health. Our study adds a unique perspective by considering the whole 24-hour day and provides new insights into a hierarchy of daily behaviours,” Dr Jo Blodgett, first author of the study and a research fellow at the University College London (UCL) Institute of Sport, Exercise and Health, told Euronews Next.

“The best activity that you can do for your heart is moderate-vigorous activity, followed by a trio of common daily activities: lighter activity, standing and sleeping, with sedentary behaviour being the most harmful,” she added.

Researchers from UCL and the University of Sydney analysed data from six studies of more than 15,000 participants from five countries. Participants wore a device on their thigh to measure activity throughout the day.

Moderate-to-vigorous activity provided the most benefits to heart health, the study found, with as little as five minutes having a noticeable effect.

Scientists found just 4 minutes of intense physical activity a day could help reduce cancer risks. This was followed by light-intensity activity and then by standing and sleeping compared with sitting. The lower the intensity of the activity, however, the longer it took for it to have a benefit.

Blodgett said, for instance, that there were clear benefits of replacing sitting with sleep on BMI and waist circumference but negligible effects on cholesterol, triglycerides (a type of fat), or blood glucose levels.

“We believe that the benefits of sleep over sitting for heart health are primarily a result of the negative impact of sitting on obesity due to other indirect factors that lead to weight gain [such as] snacking said.

Overall, while watching

TV," she replacing 30 minutes of sitting, standing, sleeping or light physical activity with moderate-to-vigorous physical activity resulted in a reduction in body mass index (BMI), the researchers found.

A greater proportion of time spent sitting was associated with a higher BMI.

The researchers highlighted some promising "occupation-based interventions" such as using a standing desk or active commuting such as cycling to work.

"Our study highlights that replacing sedentary behaviour with any other behaviour can be beneficial," Blodgett said.

"Higher intensity activity – like running or cycling – are optimal, but if this isn't possible, benefits can still be achieved when replacing sedentary behaviour with lighter activities such as walking, moving, standing or even going to sleep a little earlier".

Physical activity reduces the risk of heart attack or stroke

People who were the least active had the greatest benefit from changing their behaviours.

"We already know that exercise can have real benefits for your cardiovascular health and this encouraging research shows that small adjustments to your daily routine could lower your chances of having a heart attack or stroke," said James Leiper, the associate medical director at the British Heart Foundation, which funded the research.

"This study shows that replacing even a few minutes of sitting with a few minutes of moderate activity can improve your BMI, cholesterol, waist size, and have many more physical benefits," he added in a statement.

Working hard for little reward? Research suggests it could raise your risk of heart disease

While the study did not prove a causal link between activity and heart health, it adds to growing research linking physical activity to improved cardiovascular health.

Another University of Sydney study published in July found that just 4.5 minutes of intense physical activity every day could help to reduce the risk for some cancers.

The World Health Organization (WHO) currently recommends at least 150 minutes per week of moderate-intensity activity or at least 75 minutes per week of vigorous-intensity activity.

Cardiovascular diseases, such as heart disease and stroke, are currently the leading cause of death worldwide, resulting in an estimated 17.9 million deaths per year.

Risk factors include unhealthy diet, physical inactivity, tobacco use, and harmful alcohol use, according to WHO.

The researchers said that this new study can help to look at a range of behaviours to provide people with personalised recommendations to get more active.