

Are you sitting uncomfortably?

CAMILLA FOSTER discovers that moving your body a little and often can do wonders for your health

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MANY of us are guilty of being chained to our desk chairs during the day and to the sofa during the evenings, but what impact could this have on our health?



WHAT SIGNS MIGHT INDICATE YOU ARE SITTING DOWN TOO MUCH?

“Signs might include joint pain and stiffness, particularly in the back and neck, and muscular pain and tightness, particularly in the shoulders, at the back of the knees and muscles at the front of the hips,” says Laura Mould, lead physiotherapist at Nuffield Health Leeds Hospital. “Low energy levels, fatigue and difficulty concentrating can also be related to inactivity.” Sitting down for too long may also exacerbate symptoms from existing conditions, such as arthritis, breathing conditions or circulation problems.

HOW DOES SITTING DOWN TOO MUCH IMPACT OUR BONES AND MUSCLES? Bones:

“Sitting can make your bones weaker and eventually lead to osteoporosis and risk of fracture,” says Clara Kervyn, physiotherapist from the joint and muscle care specialists Deep Heat and Deep Freeze. “Sitting puts significant stress on the spine and can lead to compression of the discs in the spine. Spinal issues can cause significant pain and eventually immobility.” Being sedentary can also have a negative impact on our posture. “When we sit we often have bad posture as we tend to slouch, so make sure you sit right,” advises Clara. “Stop slouching and sit upright with feet flat on the floor and screens at eye level.”

Muscles

“Sitting can cause the large muscles in your legs and glutes to weaken and waste away,” warns Clara. “These muscles are essential for walking, keeping your balance and generally stabilising your body. “Sitting can also tighten hip flexors, which can lead to problems with your hip joints.”

IS IT OK TO SIT MORE AS WE AGE?

Moving your body regularly during retirement can help keep you healthy, mobile and independent. “We lose muscle much faster as we age and weakening muscles exacerbated by sitting down can lead to sarcopenia,” highlights Clara. “Eventually an old person may have difficulty getting out of bed and out of a chair potentially leading to the need for carers sooner.”

HOW OFTEN SHOULD WE MOVE?

“Little and often is the key if you have a sedentary lifestyle or find yourself stuck at your desk,” advises Laura Stocks, physiotherapy quality lead at Nuffield Health. “Getting up from the desk and taking a little walk around can really help to reduce stiff joints and tight muscles.”