

Is Sitting Too Much Bad for Your Health?

Modern society is designed for sitting.

As a result, people spend more time in a seated position than ever before.

However, you may wonder whether excessive sitting could have negative health effects.

This article tells you whether sitting is bad for your health.

People sit more than ever before

Sitting is a common body posture. When people work, socialize, study, or travel, they often do so in a seated position.

However, that doesn't mean that sitting and other sedentary behaviors are harmless. Over half of the average person's day is spent sitting, doing activities such as driving, working at a desk, or watching television.

In fact, the typical office worker may spend up to a whopping 15 hours per day sitting. On the other hand, agricultural workers only sit for about 3 hours a day ([1Trusted Source](#), [2Trusted Source](#)).

SUMMARY

While sitting is a common posture, modern society overemphasizes this position. The average office worker spends up to 15 hours a day seated.

Sitting limits the number of calories you burn

Your everyday non-exercise activities, such as standing, walking, and even fidgeting, still burn [calories](#).

This energy expenditure is known as non-exercise activity thermogenesis (NEAT), the lack of which is an important risk factor for [weight gain](#) ([3Trusted Source](#)).

Sedentary behavior, including sitting and lying down, involves very little energy expenditure. It severely limits the calories you burn through NEAT.

To put this into perspective, studies report that agricultural workers can burn up to 1,000 more calories per day than people working desk jobs ([4Trusted Source](#)).

This is because farmworkers spend most of their time walking and standing.

SUMMARY

Sitting or lying down uses far less energy than standing or moving. This is why office workers may burn up to 1,000 fewer calories per day than agricultural workers.

Sitting increases your risk of weight gain

The fewer calories you burn, the more likely you are to gain weight.

This is why sedentary behavior is so closely linked to obesity.

In fact, research shows that people with obesity sit for an average of two hours longer each day than do people with a normal weight ([5Trusted Source](#)).

SUMMARY

People who sit for long periods of time are more likely to be overweight or obese.

Sitting is linked to early death

Observational data from over 1 million people shows that the more sedentary you are, the more likely you are to die early.

In fact, the most sedentary people had a 22–49% greater risk of early death ([6, 7Trusted Source](#)).

However, even though the majority of evidence supports this finding, one study found no link between sitting time and overall [mortality](#) ([8Trusted Source](#)).

This study had some flaws, which likely explain why it contradicts all other research in the area.

SUMMARY

Evidence suggests that sedentary behavior is correlated to a much greater risk of premature death.

Sedentary behavior is linked to disease

Sedentary behavior is consistently linked to more than 30 chronic diseases and conditions, including a 112% increase in your risk of type 2 [diabetes](#) and a 147% increase in heart disease risk ([6](#), [7Trusted Source](#)).

Studies have shown that walking fewer than 1,500 steps per day, or sitting for long periods without reducing calorie intake, can cause a major increase in [insulin resistance](#), which is a key driver of type 2 diabetes ([9Trusted Source](#), [10](#)).

Researchers believe that being sedentary may have a direct effect on insulin resistance. This effect can happen in as little as one day.

SUMMARY

Long-term sedentary behavior increases your risk of health conditions like type 2 diabetes and heart disease. Inactivity is believed to play a direct role in the development of insulin resistance.

Exercise doesn't completely eliminate your risk

While regular exercise is always recommended, it doesn't completely offset all the health risks of sitting too much.

One study measured metabolic markers in 18 people following different exercise protocols. One hour of intense [exercise](#) did not make up for the negative effects of inactivity when other hours were spent sitting ([11Trusted Source](#)).

Additionally, a review of 47 studies found that prolonged sitting was strongly linked to negative health outcomes, regardless of exercise levels ([6](#)).

As expected, the negative effects were even greater for people who rarely exercised.

SUMMARY

Being physically active is incredibly beneficial, but exercise alone does not completely offset the negative effects of sitting.

The bottom line

People in Western societies spend too much time sitting.

While relaxing can be beneficial, you should try to minimize the time you spend sitting during the workday.

If you have a desk job, one solution is to get a [standing desk](#) or go for a few short walks during your workday.

Minimizing sedentary time is just as important for health as a [nutritious diet](#) and regular exercise.