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How to stop your office job from ruining your body

By Stuart Marsh · 2 days ago



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There's a supervillain in your office ruining your hot summer body, and no – it isn't Jan from accounts who uses work as a test ground for her brownie recipes.

It is – believe it or not – your humble old office chair.

No matter how ergonomic your workstation may be, you simply can't avoid the fact that many of us are spending too much time sitting. So dire is our addiction to pulling marathon-hours in front of the computer that many experts are even calling it "the new smoking".

If you work full-time, then you're likely to be spending anywhere between 30-50 hours a week sitting on your butt, and that's before you count any time spent commuting.

Add that to a world where it's increasingly easy to overeat calorie-dense foods (and increasingly difficult to find time to exercise) and you have yourself a recipe for public health disaster.

Thankfully, it's not all doom and gloom – even if you have a job that calls for long hours in the saddle, you don't have to settle with having a spare tyre around your middle.

Why sitting is so damaging

In order to beat sitting, you first must understand *why* it's so bad for you.

According to [APA Sports Physiotherapist](#) Aidan Rich, it's a bit of a two-pronged attack: when you're sitting, you're not burning any calories at all, *and* your joints are stuck in a sort of "halfway" position.

"Prolonged sitting can cause some dysfunction around joints, like the low back and hip," Rich tells Coach.

"These joints are designed to move, and be upright, so having your back and hip in a flexed position for hours at a time can contribute to imbalances, stiffness and problems with activity."

It's a sentiment that Ricardo Riskalla, celebrity trainer and founder of [RawFit](#), agrees with.

"The effects of sitting down for hours without end in front of the computer are endless," Riskalla tells Coach.

"Muscles weaken and degenerate, resulting in bone and postural problems, not to mention the diminished cardiovascular health you get, which leads to weight gain and poor food choices.

"It's basically a cycle that feeds on itself and the result is no good."

Where your body feels it most

Although excessive sitting is generally pretty unproductive for every part of your body, certain weak points begin to reveal themselves over time.

After all, if you look at sitting critically we're essentially spending the entire day in a "halfway" position – not quite standing, and not quite squatting.

"We commonly see low back, neck and hip 'niggles' at the clinic," says Rich. "Often these are improved by reducing the total amount of sitting during the week, as well as increasing exercise levels."

Symptoms of having these "niggles" often reveal themselves during physical activity: it's always the first squat session back at the gym, or a game of social tough footy where the excessive sitters will be most vulnerable to injury.

"The areas of the neck, shoulders, arms and hands are the first to show up signs of misuse due to a sedentary lifestyle, but in general all body parts are affected in a negative way – even your psychological view about exercise," adds Riskalla.

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How often you should move

If you've got a job that simply *demands* you spend a lot of time sitting – think driving a truck or working on a computer – then all is not lost. That's because it's totally possible to kick your body into gear by doing a little bit of exercise, often.

According to Rich, it's got a lot less to do with how much time you spend sitting total, and a lot more to do with how much of that sitting you do in a row.

"Prolonged sitting (more than 30 minutes or so) appears to be more harmful than the total amount of sitting throughout the day," says Rich.

"So it's important to try and break up sitting where possible. This can be done by standing during phone calls, having standing or walking meetings, or visiting someone face to face rather than emailing them."

Strategies to beat office butt

If you're determined not to die from sitting-related chronic disease, then short of changing careers you've got your work cut out for you. According to both experts, the key is simply to incorporate movement into your everyday routine – and it needn't be something as hard-core as a gym session or a run.

"The simplest change to make outside of work is to include some regular exercise. Your body loves – and will respond well to – variety, so a mix of exercise is best," says Rich.

"This could include walking, gym classes, weight training, swimming, tennis, or many other options."

Once you've got the sweat session down to a daily routine, Riskalla recommends focusing on your mind – because a mindful person is more likely to recognise the harmful effects of inactivity.

"To diminish the side effects of a sedentary lifestyle, I recommend to first look after the mind with meditation or deep breathing," advises Riskalla.

"With a calm mind the second step is to plan well, including exercising before work and trying to walk in the office every hour, even if it's just to speak to a colleague or go for lunch."

If you really want to crush your office chair between your athletically-chiselled buns, then Rich recommends a form of aerobic activity every day, as well as a couple of sessions on the weights.

"It's best to have some cardiovascular exercise – walk, run, bike, row or swim – most days of the week and some form of resistance or weights training at least twice a week," says Rich.

"As little as 10-40 minutes most days is all you need depending on the intensity of the exercise!"

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