

Sitting down on the job is slowly killing you

By Andrew May - a performance coach who has spent the past 15 years working with elite sportspeople.



Walk and talk: get out in the open air and conduct a healthier style of meeting. Photo: Jessica Shapiro

It's official – lack of physical activity and sitting on our ever-expanding backsides is killing us. So while you're sitting down to read this blog, here's a few hard facts about what's happening to you at this very moment:

- An Australian study lead by Professor David Dunstan showed the longer you sit, the greater your risk of dying early. Adults who sat for more than 11 hours a day had a 40 per cent increased risk of dying within three years **compared to people who sat for less than four hours a day** .
- A quarter of young adults aged between 18 and 24 only walk an average of five minutes a day (BUPA UK survey on 2000 people)\
- Researchers from The University of Queensland found **every hour we sit down watching TV cuts 22 minutes from our life span** , which is double the time (11 minutes) another study estimated the time by which every cigarette shortens a smoker's life.

But honestly, do you really need research to tell you the average adult is moving way too little? Take a look at the people sitting next to you in the office, on the bus, in the airport, on the train. Lack of movement is weighing us down.

A case in point is a client of mine who started a coaching program earlier this year. I asked Dave to wear a pedometer to see how many steps he was taking in an average day. The results highlight why his friends have given him the nickname Day Spa Dave.

A day in the life of Day Spa Dave

The alarm clock bellows and Dave falls out of bed and walks to the toilet (10 steps). After showering he puts on his clothes and walks to the kitchen to make a cup of coffee and throw down some cereal (25 steps).

He walks out the door, presses the button on the lift and arrives at the car park, walks to his car and presses a button to open the front door (45 steps). Day Spa Dave then sits in his car for 30 minutes and drives to a car park in the city, circling to find a spot close to the lift (zero steps). He walks to the lift, presses another button, out of the lift and then walks to his office (220 steps).

Dave sits in his comfortable chair (with wheels), a colleague places a coffee on his desk, and he doesn't stand until 11am (zero steps). He walks to the toilet at morning tea time, then catches a taxi to a client meeting and then a taxi back to his office (430 steps).

Our hero walks to coffee shop below office for lunch (80 steps) then returns to the office for back-to-back meetings all afternoon, sitting down the majority of time (90 steps). He walks to the lift, presses a button, gets out of the lift and then walks back to his car (220 steps).

Once home, Dave has a cup of tea with his wife and talks about his hectic day, followed by a shower then ducking out to pick up takeaway for dinner (320 steps). The dishes are stacked into the dishwasher and then it's time to hit the couch to watch TV for a few hours before bed (30 steps). Finally, Dave switches off the TV, brushes his teeth and calls it a night (30 steps).

Total steps in Dave's typical day? 1470. The recognised daily goal for good health? 8000-10,000. Is it any wonder Day Spa Dave's weight had gradually crept up over the past few years? It was a good wake-up call to get him moving a lot more.

We're getting kinda heavy

The average Australian is gaining weight at the rate of 500 grams per year. Dr Paul Batman, Director at Australian College, is an advocate of squeezing more walking into our sedentary lives.

"From a health perspective, if people accumulate several two-minute bouts of stair-climbing each day, a number of health risk factors can be reduced after several weeks," he says. "Eleven to 12 minutes of stair climbing per day improves aerobic fitness and reduces the bad LDL cholesterol."

And how does this impact the bottom line? "If a man weighing 80 kilograms (all things being equal) climbed just two flights of stairs daily he would lose 2.7 kilograms per year."

Five ways to take a stand

1. Walk-and-talk meetings

Rather than sitting all day, fire things up with a walking meeting. Tim Wilding has made walking meetings part of the DNA at CommInsure. "Most days our leaders have at least one 30-minute walking meeting to take in some fresh air and get the

blood pumping.” A study at Stanford University found creativity levels were consistently and significantly higher after walking meetings.

2. Standing meetings

Karl Armstrong from NZI decided to replace the 90-minute Monday morning leadership meeting with a 20-minute standing meeting. “The results were immediate. The team was a lot more engaged, energy levels were higher and it is a much more effective way to start the week. It also supports our overall wellbeing program, encouraging employees to be active throughout the day.”

3. Cut out the cabs

James Patterson from CBRE made a conscious decision to cut back on inner-city cab rides. “A lot of my meetings are in the city and it’s easy to get into the habit of always catching a taxi. I walk to as many meetings as possible and this keeps my energy levels consistent throughout the day, and consciously walking back a different way means I’m more likely to run into business people I know.”

4. Standing work stations

With the majority of office workers now spending more than five hours a day resting on their gluteus maximus, a number of organisations are introducing standing workstations to minimise back pain and overuse injuries and to encourage movement and productivity at work. Pavani Ram, an associate professor of preventive medicine, has been using a stand-up desk since 2011. “I am amazed at how much more energetic I feel at the end of a working day, and I no longer suffer from lower back pain.”

5. Company walking challenges

Why not get yourself and your team involved in a walking challenge? Organisations such as 10,000 Steps Australia and Global Corporate Challenge (GCC) offer a choice of programs that have been designed to get you and your company moving. GCC found 75 per cent of employees reported improvements in morale and one-third reported an increase in productivity.

Just move it

I predict companies of the future will be doing all they can to keep employees (like Day Spa Dave) moving throughout the day to increase energy levels, enhance creativity and boost productivity.

Source: <http://www.theage.com.au/executive-style/management/blogs/performance-matters/sitting-down-on-the-job-is-slowly-killing-you-20140702-3b8yc.html#ixzz36NrWoEPc>