

# PLEASE BE SEATED?

## *Re-Thinking How Much Sitting You Do*

### ALTERNATIVES TO SITTING

Even if your job keeps you sedentary throughout the day, there are ways to improve your posture and negate some of the adverse effects that result from sitting all day.



BY BECCA NEWELL

For those of us with office jobs, extended periods of time spent in a seated position isn't something we can easily avoid. But avoid it we should, as it can have various debilitating effects on our overall health. Here are the three biggest reasons to rethink how much you sit and some suggestions for doing otherwise. Our advice? Get up, even if you can't exactly get moving.

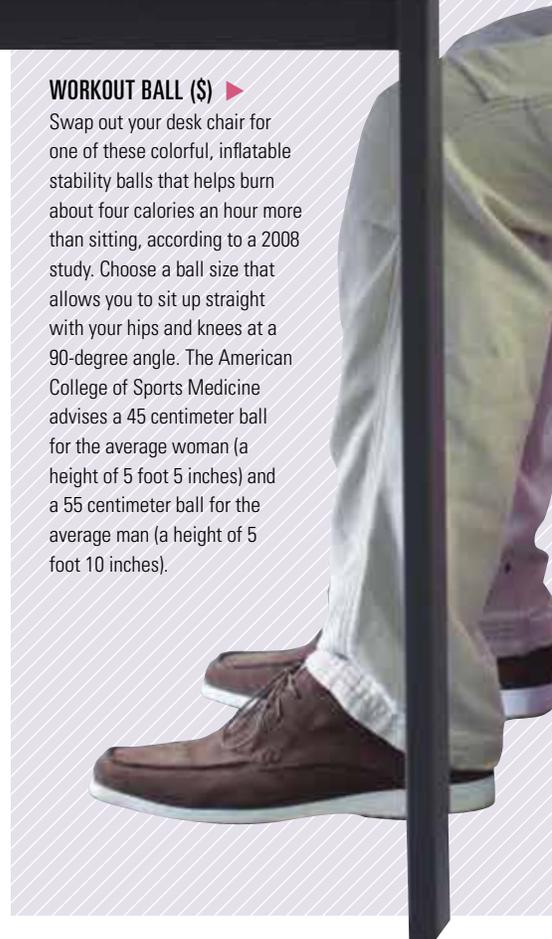
**1** Sedentary behavior causes significant health risks, such as diabetes, cardiovascular disease, and even increased mortality. A 2012 study (of more than 200,000 people) led by the University of Sydney found that people older than 45, who sit for 11 hours or more a day, are at a 40 percent greater risk of mortality than those who sit for less than four hours a day.

**2** Too much sitting can result in poor circulation in the legs, which can lead to swollen ankles, varicose veins, and even blood clots. Fidgeting however, may help. Research recently published in the *American Journal of Preventive Medicine* suggests no increase in fatality risk for those with fidgety tendencies, who sit for more than seven hours a day.

**3** Studies suggest even moderate exercise on a regular basis can't reverse the adverse effects (in terms of the increase in chronic disease risk) of time spent sitting. Dubbed the "Active Couch Potato phenomenon," a 2012 finding supported the idea that the protective effect of daily physical activity doesn't counteract the deteriorating consequences of prolonged sedentary behavior.

### WORKOUT BALL (\$) ▶

Swap out your desk chair for one of these colorful, inflatable stability balls that helps burn about four calories an hour more than sitting, according to a 2008 study. Choose a ball size that allows you to sit up straight with your hips and knees at a 90-degree angle. The American College of Sports Medicine advises a 45 centimeter ball for the average woman (a height of 5 foot 5 inches) and a 55 centimeter ball for the average man (a height of 5 foot 10 inches).





#### SIT-STAND WORKSTATION (\$\$)

Since several studies indicate that standing for a long period of time can have similar adverse health effects to extended sitting, a good solution is a sit-stand workstation: an adjustable desk that allows the user to alternate between sitting and standing throughout the workday.

#### TREADMILL DESK (\$\$\$)

Go for a stroll while typing on your laptop or talking on your phone, courtesy of a treadmill desk. Several studies suggest cognitive function and productiveness are not impaired by walking while you work. And although one 2015 study contradicted these findings (in terms of efficiency while typing and comprehension rates) results indicated any decline in productivity doesn't necessarily outweigh the overall benefits of physical activity gained from the treadmill.

## PROPER (SITTING) POSTURE



**When sitting can't be avoided, it's important to sit—not slouch!—correctly. The Occupational Safety & Hazard Administration set forth the following guidelines for better posture while perched at a desk.**

- Hands, wrists, and forearms are straight and parallel to the ground
- Head is in line with the torso
- Elbows are bent between 90 and 120 degrees and remain close to the body
- Shoulders are relaxed
- Back is supported with appropriate lumbar support
- Thighs and hips are parallel to the ground (and supported by a well-padded seat)
- Feet are slightly forward of the knees, which are positioned roughly the same height as the hips

**It's also important to arrange your desk to avoid hunching, over-stretching, and other behaviors that can cause harm to the body.**

- Place screen directly in front of you at eye level and about an arm's length away.
- Avoid screen glare (and any other reflections from office lighting and sunlight) as much as possible.
- Place keyboard about four to six inches from the front edge of the desk. Be sure to keep wrists straight while typing.
- The mouse should be as close to you as possible. Keep the wrist supported by using a mouse pad with a memory foam or gel wrist rest.