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Sitting to Death

I consider myself to be an active person with an active lifestyle. I play sports, I exercise regularly, I practice yoga, and have an active social life. However, when I started researching this article, I got a wake-up call that made me stand up and take note of how inactive my life really is and how it's negatively affecting my health.

Sitting, it turns out, is inching me towards a permanent lie-down...six feet under! Dubbed "sitting disease" by researchers, sitting for long periods of time increases risk of heart disease, hypertension, diabetes, stroke, kidney stones, and various cancers. That's quite the list. Inactivity ranks number two as the top risk factor for non-communicable diseases. It is outranked only by smoking.

While I meet and usually exceed Canada's physical activity guideline of 150 minutes of intense exercise per week, sitting at my desk is cheating me out of the benefits of that activity. Prolonged sitting can trigger unhealthy metabolic changes that compromise the body's ability to break down fats and sugars regardless if that period of sitting is bookended by activity.

Like thousands of Canadians, I have a desk job that promotes sitting for the majority of my work day. I can't just take off when I feel like moving. I've got work to do! The good news is that you don't need to run a marathon on your lunch break. Researchers promote frequent, short breaks of activity throughout the day. Each hour, take a one minute break from sitting to help stave off those metabolic

changes and help rejuvenate both body and mind.

One of the biggest challenges in getting workers moving is the workplace culture. One of my colleagues ordered a new desk "chair". It's an exercise ball with legs. His core is engaged the whole time he's sitting on it. He is getting the activity the rest of us are lacking BUT he initially took some good-natured teasing from the rest of us. Well, the joke's now on us! He's our change agent and if every office can have at least one employee who will take the initiative to stand, walk, and/or stretch while working, eventually it won't feel awkward or odd, but rather be the norm.

Here are some options for active work ranging from costly to free!

Treadmill desks – walk while working

Height adjustable desks – stand at your desk for part of the day

Keep an exercise ball at your desk to sit on for part of the day and use for your one minute "activity breaks"

Walk to talk to colleagues face-to-face instead of e-mailing or calling them.

Take the stairs

Walk at lunch

Park further away or get off the bus a few stops earlier.

Hold meetings and take calls while standing or walking.

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