

Study says stop being a couch potato, get up and move more

By Los Angeles Times, adapted by Newsela staff on 03.03.14

Word Count **797**



Robert Wilson checks his bingo cards while playing a game at the Clovis Bingo Hall on Sept. 30, 2008, in Clovis, Calif.
Photo: Darrell Wong/Fresno Bee/MCT

LOS ANGELES — A new study is telling older people to stand up and move around.

It's not enough for people to get regular exercise as they get older, the study found. Researchers say it's also important not to spend too much time sitting down.

In fact, every extra hour of sitting nearly doubles the risk of disability for people over 60. This includes trouble getting around the house and feeding themselves, according to a study published Wednesday in the *Journal of Physical Activity & Health*.

If people sit too much it doesn't matter how much exercise they get, the researchers concluded. Researchers from Northwestern's Feinberg Medical School, Rush University Medical Center, Harvard School of Public Health, and the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention participated in the study.

Exercise Alone Isn't Enough

People who get up and do even 30 minutes of light activity can improve their health, researchers said. Stand-up bingo, anyone?

A sedentary lifestyle is an inactive one with a lot of sitting or lying down. It is associated with a variety of health problems, including diabetes and heart disease leading to death, the researchers wrote.

Many people may have thought they did what they needed to do for their health if they followed federal health suggestions. The recommendations suggest people do 150 minutes a week of moderate exercise.

Apparently, that's not enough.

The researchers wanted to figure out whether people spent too much time sitting down because they weren't exercising. They also wanted to see if sitting is a risk factor for disability.

The researchers used information from the National Health and Nutrition Examination Surveys from 2003 to 2005. The information includes questionnaires and physical exams from 2,286 people 60 and older.

Sitting Looked At A Lot

The study found that people in the sample spent almost nine of their waking hours a day sitting down out 14 hours awake. A total of 3.6 percent of them reported disability in their activities of daily living. This includes trouble getting in and out of bed, getting dressed and being able to walk in the house.

About 12 percent of them reported no long-lasting conditions. But 52 percent reported arthritis, 58 percent reported high blood pressure and 30 percent reported [obesity \(https://www.newsela.com/?tag=obesity\)](https://www.newsela.com/?tag=obesity). People who spent more time sitting tended to be older, male, more educated and less wealthy. They also tended to smoke and be in bad health.

Sitting has been getting a lot of attention lately, to the point that there's a new saying: "Sitting is the new smoking." The study's authors encouraged everyone to sit less. They also specifically suggested that people exercise while they watch TV and are at work. Walking to meetings and standing at desks are other ways to be more active and reduce the amount of time sitting still.

"The real problem is that we are raising sedentary children," said one of the researchers, Pamela Semanik, assistant professor of nursing at Rush College of Nursing in Chicago. Spending lots of time sitting is something that is becoming harmfully well-established in our culture, she explained.

At her department in Rush, the results of the study convinced her coworkers to change their ways, she said. Semanik personally said she has sold her car and reads articles while walking on a treadmill.

The researchers said as many as 5.3 million annual deaths worldwide are related to too little activity.

"The \$64,000 Question"

So how much time is OK to spend sitting on the sofa?

"That's the \$64,000 question," Semanik said. "We don't know how much is OK." She said researchers suspect that one way to lessen the harm caused by sitting is by taking frequent movement breaks.

Researchers say the study is the first to document how sedentary behavior relates to disability in activities of daily living, regardless of how much people exercise. There were limits to the research, though. The gadgets used to monitor activity, called accelerometers, don't detect such movements as cycling. They were also not worn for swimming. So if people swam or bicycled, those activities were not recorded.

The research is in favor of any program that gets people to get up, regardless of what exercise they do. "Among some older adults, reducing sedentary behavior may be (easier) than increasing moderate-vigorous activity," the researchers wrote. This is especially true in people who suffer from illnesses, pain, and heart disease.

The researchers are not suggesting there's no value in moderate exercise. They say moderate exercise is a cheap way to be healthier and reduce health care costs. But the study is looking at a very different question, Semanik said: How people stay independent, out of nursing homes and able to care for themselves.

Even a lot of daily exercise may not offset the negative effects of a sedentary lifestyle.

Quiz

- 1 Which detail from the article BEST supports the main idea?
 - (A) It's not enough for people to get regular exercise as they get older, the study found.
 - (B) If people sit too much it doesn't matter how much exercise they get, the researchers concluded.
 - (C) A sedentary lifestyle is an inactive one with a lot of sitting or lying down.
 - (D) The recommendations suggest people do 150 minutes a week of moderate exercise.

- 2 Select the paragraph from "Sitting Looked At A Lot" that mentions researchers comparing sitting to another unhealthy habit.

- 3 Which of the following sentences contains a word that is a synonym for "take part"?
 - (A) This includes trouble getting around the house and feeding themselves.
 - (B) The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention participated in the study.
 - (C) If people sit too much it doesn't matter how much exercise they get, the researchers concluded.
 - (D) It is associated with a variety of health problems, including diabetes and heart disease leading to death, the researchers wrote.

- 4 Which of the following sentences contains a word that is an antonym for "extreme"?
 - (A) The recommendations suggest people do 150 minutes a week of moderate exercise.
 - (B) A sedentary lifestyle is an inactive one with a lot of sitting or lying down.
 - (C) The researchers said as many as 5.3 million annual deaths worldwide are related to too little activity.
 - (D) She said researchers suspect that one way to lessen the harm caused by sitting is by taking frequent movement breaks.