

Daily Union Article

Saturday, March 11, 2017

Title: Don't Settle for Sitting

This week I presented to a group on the topic "Deskercise." The program brings awareness of the health concerns related to our more sedentary lifestyle. Over the past century, Americans as a whole are less and less physically active. Adults spend more than half their waking hours being sedentary, i.e. we spend too much time seated and inactive.

Too little physical activity can negatively affect our health and lead to increased risk of chronic disease, obesity, and premature death. In a January 2015, report published in the Annals of Internal Medicine, doctors Alter, Faulkner, and Oh share that our extensive sedentary lifestyle – watching television, working at a computer, commuting, or doing other physically inactive pursuits can lead us to a premature death.

The health hazards of inactivity are far-reaching. They are not limited to the well-documented cardiovascular health issues. Research supports that additional risk factors such as type 2 diabetes, cancer, and cancer-related deaths are linked to very sedentary lifestyles, as well.

Those who work in offices spend 65 – 75% of their workday in a seated position. Sitting too long increases health risks even for those who exercise regularly. Research shows that taking breaks throughout the day to reduce prolonged sitting time is important for good health.

If you work at a desk job, you can improve your health by including short bouts of activity during the day. Being tied to a cubicle may limit your ability to move around, but that's where *deskercise* comes in! Reduce your muscle tension in the neck, shoulders, and back by using exercises you can do sitting at a desk. Even if you are retired and not anchored down by work tasks, you can use these exercises to keep you limber and strong.

As with any significant change in your activity level, you should consult with your doctor to make sure the types of exercise you want to try will work with your current level of health and well-being.

The first step to *deskercise* activities is to ensure you are maintaining good posture. Good posture means you have trained your body to stand, walk, sit and lie in positions that reduce strain on your body.

As part of their online health resource library, the Cleveland Clinic offers these health benefits of good posture:

- ✓ Keeps bones and joints in the correct alignment so that muscles are being used properly.
- ✓ Helps decrease abnormal wearing of joint surfaces that could result in arthritis.
- ✓ Decreases the stress on the ligaments holding the joints of the spine together.
- ✓ Prevents the spine from becoming fixed in abnormal positions.
- ✓ Prevents fatigue because muscles are being used more efficiently, allowing the body to use less energy.
- ✓ Prevents strain or overuse problems.
- ✓ Prevents backache and muscular pain.
- ✓ Contributes to a good appearance.

Here are a couple suggestions to get you on the path to better posture:

- Sit up with your back straight and your shoulders back. Your buttocks should touch the back of your chair.
- Support and maintain the natural curves of your back. You can use a small rolled up towel or a lumbar roll to help you maintain the back's curves.
- Distribute your body weight evenly on both hips.
- Keep your knees bent at a right angle. Keep your knees even with or slightly higher than your hips. You can use a step stool or foot rest to help elevate your feet, if needed.
- Keep your feet flat on the floor.
- Shift positions at least every 30 minutes.

Source: <http://my.clevelandclinic.org/health/articles/posture-for-a-healthy-back>

Doing chair exercises is a great way to make sure you are changing positions and correcting your posture as the day progresses. Make sure you create an environment that will optimize the benefits of exercising this way. Choose a chair that allows you to keep your knees at 90 degrees when seated. If you are in a wheelchair, securely apply the brakes or otherwise immobilize the chair. Try to sit up straight and tall while exercising. Add resistance to strengthening exercises by incorporating hand weights or resistance bands. Bend forward from the hips, not the waist, keeping your back straight while stretching. Finally, always warm up your muscles before you stretch.

Here are a couple basic exercises you can do in your chair:

Shoulder Blade Pinch:

1. Sit up straight with your shoulders down and back away from your ears.
2. Pinch your shoulder blades together by trying to bring your elbows together behind your back.
3. Hold for a few seconds, working your way up to a 30 second hold.
4. Repeat three to five times

Back Stretch

1. Sit up straight with your shoulders down and back away from your ears.
2. Bend at the hips and rest your torso on your thighs, letting your head and arms hang loose.
3. Hold for 15-30 seconds then slowly return to the starting position.
4. Repeat three to five times.

*Note: You can widen your legs to make more room for your body.

There are many more chair exercises you can use to help keep your body limber, strong and healthier. The benefits of exercise are cumulative, so any amount is good for health and well-being. In addition to improving health, desk exercises may also help boost your productivity and energy level!

For more information on desk exercises and health, go to the Geary County K-State Research and Extension website: <http://www.geary.k-state.edu/> then click on the Health, Home, and Family tab to find the "Deskercise – Sit, Stretch, Strengthen" bulletin for you to download and use. You can also call me at the Geary County Extension Office at 785-238-4161. Until next time, keep living resourcefully!