



THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE SEDENTARY LIFESTYLE

How have we ended up sitting down for most of our lives?
And – more importantly – what can we do to change that?

Sitting down is killing us. That's not hyperbole; the World Health Organisation estimates that physical inactivity - or not moving around enough throughout the day - is the fourth-largest killer in the world, responsible for 3.2 million deaths per year. So how have we let this happen?

There are a lot of different theories; do we blame modern technology? Televisions, computers and videogame consoles don't require activity, but we all love doing these things as leisure time. How is this sedentary lifestyle translating into figures?

- 1 in 4 adults do not get a healthy amount of activity everyday

- 80% of adolescents are deemed 'not active enough'
- British people sit for 8.9 hours a day
- Approx 25% of Europeans, Americans and Canadians have metabolic syndrome

Unfortunately, most people don't spend their lives actually relaxing during this 'leisure' time. Instead, the average British adult spends over 40 hours each week at work, and it's here that the biggest change can be seen. Over the years, more and more UK jobs have involved long periods of sitting down each day, with few people working in physically active roles have pretty much become a thing of the past.



*Standing up
while working
increases
productivity
by as much as
30 per cent.*

In fact, between 1981 and 2008, the number of routine manual jobs declined by more than half. In their place, we have more offices, call centres and tech hubs. These new careers have been great for the economy, but unfortunately not for people's health.

At the end of the day, the human body is designed to be on its feet and moving for most of each day. It is unnatural for us to remain seated for long periods of time, and the health risks are numerous. There are strong links between being sedentary for long periods of time and conditions such as cancer, heart disease, back pain and mental health problems.

So what can we do about this? The obvious answer is to stand up more, but this is not always easy when much of our work is tied to a desk. There are, in fact, many options to allow us to undo the harm caused by sitting. Workplaces can encourage their employees to stand up and take a break every 30 minutes, for example, which can have a major positive effect on workplace health and wellbeing.

When looking around an office, we can in fact see dozens of activities that could be done standing. You don't need to sit down to take a

phone call, have a meeting or view a presentation. In many offices, colleagues talk to each other over the computer rather than simply getting up and walking over to each other.

You don't even need to sit down to use a computer. Height adjustable desks are becoming more and more popular, which provides the instant table height change for best sitting position as well as standing break time at recommended pace. The human body is not built for long periods of sitting, in fact, some research suggests that standing up while working increases productivity by as much as 30 per cent.

It doesn't look as if the future will contain more active lifestyles. Our lives are increasingly going to be spent in front of computers, which could have major health implications if action isn't taken. All it takes is building up to standing up each day, so you should aim to encourage this in your own life wherever possible.

Want to know how to you can do more to improve your health at work? Check out our "posture and active working guidance" (hyperlink) to improve your wellbeing in the workplace.

Sources

<http://www.getbritainstanding.org/index.php>

<http://www.who.int/mediacentre/factsheets/fs385/en/>

<http://www.nhs.uk/Livewell/fitness/Pages/sitting-and-sedentary-behaviour-are-bad-for-your-health.aspx>

<http://www.resolutionfoundation.org/app/uploads/2014/08/The-Changing-Shape-of-the-UK-Job-Market.pdf>