

Media Release



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Sitting down is killing us

Two researchers presenting to an international conference in Melbourne this week explain how sedentary behaviour is a major cause of heart disease.

Research confirms that too much sitting increases your risk of developing heart disease by almost 50%, even though you may be meeting your daily minimum physical activity requirements.

Professor Marc Hamilton from Pennington Biomedical Research Center, Louisiana has made a career out of understanding what happens to the inside of the body when we are inactive.

He presents his research this week at the National Heart Foundation of Australia's Conference 2011 Heart to Heart - From Access to Action, which runs from Thursday 17 March to Saturday 19 March at the Melbourne Convention and Exhibition Centre.

"Some people sit for up to 16 hours a day – as much as 70-85 hours a week! Over the last 10 years, we've studied the impact that too much sitting has on the body in terms of developing heart disease, type 2 diabetes and a string of other ailments. And the results are as compelling as they are alarming," said Professor Hamilton.

"Regularly exercising **is not** the opposite of being inactive or sitting too much," he said.

"Going for a run each day, although good for you and important to do, will not counter the effects of hours and hours of chair time.

"We now have the evidence to prove that diet and exercise are just part of what's required to be truly healthy.

"We have just published the first of a series of studies testing the effects of sitting on people who exercise a fair bit and were not obese, yet even if we reduced their calorie intake to match their sedentary lifestyles, they showed sign of pre-diabetes after **just one day** of sitting. In contrast they tested healthy on another day when they were just pottering around or standing for 75% of the day.

"Our goal should be to eliminate as many of those sedentary hours as possible to prevent chronic disease."

According to Professor Hamilton, the first thing the Australian Government can do is to help increase awareness of this issue.

"The problem is people feel safety in numbers. You look around and think that because everyone else is sitting all day at work and because your Government or Doctor has never warned you about it, you are safe," he said

“And once people become obese they’re in a catch 22. Being sedentary contributes to getting fat and being obese contributes to being sick and feeling so run down that you feel inclined to sit more.

“The good news is that my team is working with unbridled energy and passion to not only sound the alarm to prevent disease but to find solutions for people who are already too sick or unfit to exercise. And just by standing more, we can improve metabolism in people who cannot exercise.”

According to home grown expert, Associate Professor David Dunstan, the workplace has been identified as one of the settings for starting to reverse the damage of sedentary practices in the adult population.

Professor Dunstan is a VicHealth Public Health Research Fellow and is the Head of the Physical Activity laboratory in the Division of Metabolism and Obesity at Baker IDI Heart and Diabetes Institute.

Professor Dunstan and his team have spent the last two years identifying how employers can assist people to sit less at work and at the same time, maintain or even increase productivity.

“We now know enough about the damage sitting for 6 hrs a day or more causes to warrant recommending specific changes at organisational levels, individually and in the workplace to encourage more movement at work,” said Professor Dunstan.

“For example, organisations could introduce a policy recommending workers with desk roles, stand up and move around every 30 minutes which is already consistent with existing OH&S messages.

”Individuals can ban e-mailing colleagues in the same office; remove the rubbish bin from individual desks and use a central rubbish bin; take and make phone calls standing up and punctuate lengthy meetings by standing.

“Height adjustable standing hot desks and work stations are good examples of workplace changes that will be effective in encouraging a more active workforce. But these changes will take longer to realise because some expenditure is required,” said Professor Dunstan.

The Heart Foundation is grateful to our major conference sponsors, the Victorian Department of Health (Principal Partner) and Astra Zeneca (Platinum Sponsor), for their support.

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