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Women's Health Tip – Is Sitting the New Smoking?

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Here is the simple truth – we are spending an inordinate amount of time sitting and it may be killing us. The average person sits more than 64 hours a week, contributing to a myriad of health problems and resulting in the coining of the phrase "sitting is the new smoking." If you work in an office environment, it is likely that the majority of your time at work is spent sitting; e.g., attending meetings, working on the computer, reviewing paperwork, or talking on the phone.

Human beings were not built to spend this amount of time in the seated position. Sitting for extended periods shuts the body down at a metabolic level. Our circulation slows, and we use less blood sugar, resulting in insulin resistance. We burn less fat, and we turn less bad cholesterol into good cholesterol. Sitting increases our risk of heart disease, diabetes, cancer and depression.

Here are some of the more frightening conclusions drawn by researchers:

- After one hour of sitting, the production of enzymes that burn fat can decline by as much as 90 percent.
- For every two hours a woman sits, she increases her risk of developing diabetes by seven percent.
- Women who sit nine or more hours a day are more likely to be depressed than those who sat fewer than six.
- A man who sits more than six hours a day has an 18 percent increased risk of dying from heart disease.

And, unfortunately, regular exercise does not absolve us from our otherwise sedentary situation (this does not, however, lessen the healthful benefits of exercise). Here is probably the most concerning conclusion by researchers – the more time people spend sitting, the earlier they die, regardless of other factors, such as age, weight and exercise. In other words, regular exercise does not counteract the negative effect of prolonged sitting.

What can you do to stem the tide? The easiest thing you can do is take frequent breaks from sitting. Even standing and walking for just one minute can help. Set a timer to remind you to get up and move. You may also consider investing in office furniture that is designed for this very problem. Adjustable-height desks allow you to comfortably use your work station from the seated or standing position. Ball chairs promote active sitting. If you are really daring, try a treadmill desk. Instead of meeting a colleague for coffee, suggest a walking meeting. The bottom line: we need to be mindful of how much time we spend sitting and make a conscious effort to get out of our chairs as often as possible.