

THE STRESS OF SITTING

THE PHYSICAL DANGERS OF THE DESK-BOUND— AND HOW TO AMELIORATE THE PROBLEM

Sitting all day at the office may be the toughest marathon you'll ever endure-especially if you sit improperly and don't get up periodically to take a break. Add to that sheer number of hours per week you perform this "non-activity," and you can see why we're comparing it with a marathon.

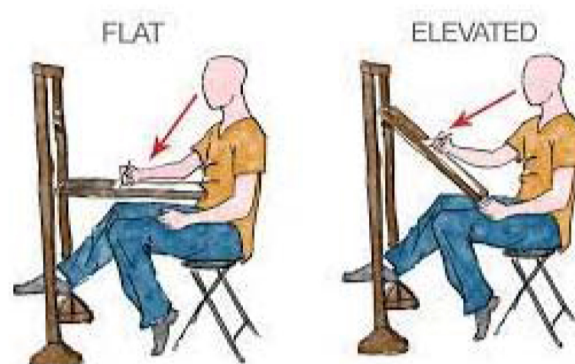
Why is sitting so physically stressful? The answer is simple: You sit to take a load off your feet, which means that load has to be supported elsewhere. Your back is the most common victim of this shifting of physical responsibility.

Because of the way your body operates the load that may have been merely annoying to your tired feet when you were standing is actually heavier and more threatening to your back after you sit down. When you stand, the forces pressing on the disks in your spine are relatively equal. When you sit and thus bend your spine, the balance is uneven. That creates vulnerability, especially if you sit in way that leaves your back unsupported. In fact, sitting with an unsupported back puts 40 percent more pressure on spinal disks than standing does.

Your legs fare no better, especially if you're prone to varicose veins or phlebitis (a blood-clotting condition that's a frequent complication of varicose veins). When you're seated, your leg muscles aren't contracting to pump blood back to you heart. This allows a pooling of blood in your legs. · Even if you don't have varicose veins, the sluggish circulation that results from sitting too long can lead to varicose veins.

Add to this the general achiness of shoulder and neck muscles that occurs from hunching over your desk, and you're describing one unhappy body. What can you do if you sit all day during the week, and your body is crying out for help?

- Pull your chair up as close to your desk as possible to prevent slouching, which makes your back, shoulders and neck ache. Try to sit directly over your work. If you must lean forward, try to bend from your hips, rather than rounding your back.
- To read, use an upright book rest. Or hold the reading matter at eye level while resting your elbows on the desk. Keep your head centered over your body.
- Keep a small footstool or phone book under your desk, prop one or both feet on the stool to help relieve lower-back pressure.
- Sit on both hips at the same time to distribute your weight evenly.
- Don't twist your body as you work; stay facing directly forward, If you must turn, move your body as a single unit-trunk, hips, legs, and feet together.



- Fidget. Forget what your parents told you about sitting still. You should move around a lot: Shifting your weight and sitting forward on the chair takes the stress off your lower back. You should also forget the taboo about resting your elbows on the table—that position takes some body weight off your spine, too.
- Don't cross your legs, which experts say nearly doubles the stress on your spine and muscles.



- Learn some simple in-your-chair exercises to stretch out muscles and keen circulation, flowing. (See "Quick Stretches")
- At lunch. take a walk or run. A brisk walk or regular running program (or any aerobic exercises that keeps your legs moving) can do wonders for your circulation as well as for your tired unused muscles.
- At the very least, get up from your desk once an hour and walk around. Remember, the more often you change positions in and out of your chair, the better

Quick Stretches To Unlink Your Body

Shoulder Circles: Circle your shoulders backward in a wide arch.

Head Circles: Circle your head slowly and gently, first to the left, then to the right.

Back Arches: Place your hands in the small of your back and arch gently backward. If you have trouble with an excessively arched back, don't do this exercise. However, most people need to arch their backs more than they do. For safety's sake, do these standing up.

Upper-Body Stretch: Stand in a doorway. Hold both sides of the doorway, with your hands behind you at about shoulder level Let your arms straighten as you lean forward. Hold your chest up and chin in. (Be careful not to use too much force—remember this is a stretching exercise.)

Body Curl: Push your chair away from your desk, lean forward and touch your toes. Unwind and sit back up, allowing the spine to uncurl one vertebra at a time.

Leg and Foot, Exercises: Circle your ankles slowly, and flex and point your toes.

If you have any further questions concerning the above article please call or write to either my office or to The Winged Foot Magazine; all questions will be answered.

Note About the Author:

Dr. Joseph Kansao has practiced for over 30 years as a chiropractic physician and has offices at 1120 Park Avenue in New York and in Greenwich, CT. Dr. Kansao specializes in Sports Medicine, athletic injuries and Pain Management and has served as Team Chiropractor at the Olympic and for numerous athletic teams and International/Professional events. Dr. Kansao is one of the nation's first chiropractors to be awarded the distinguished Diplomate of the American Board of Chiropractic Practitioners as well as Diplomate of the American Academy of Pain Management.