

We're not designed to sit for long hours



**YOUR
HEALTH**

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In modern India, our 21st-century lifestyle is shaped by digital devices, media consumption and desk jobs, which have significantly reduced our levels of physical activity. The Covid-19 pandemic amplified this sedentary trend, turning homes into classrooms and offices. Today, prolonged sitting affects nearly everyone: schoolchildren, white-collar professionals and homemakers.

Tasks that once were not sedentary, like chopping vegetables, cooking meals or even doing laundry, now often are. Public and private transportation have become so convenient that many take only a few steps before settling into a vehicle. The result is a life with minimal natural movement. We have almost forgotten how to walk.

However, the human body did not evolve for this. We are biologically designed to stand upright, walk, run, squat and move frequently. Sitting for long hours is not a natural position. When we sit, our hips, knees and ankles are kept in a constant state of flexion. This posture reduces circulation and causes the muscles supporting the spine, like the core and gluteal muscles, to weaken gradually and silently.

The effects of prolonged sitting set in so slowly that they are not always immediately noticeable. There may be no obvious symptoms at first. Over time, however, the weakness and strain build up and often manifest as pain in the lower back, neck, shoulders or even behind the knees and thighs. Some people may experience numbness or tingling in the legs and feet, signs of nerve compression or poor circulation. Unfortunately, these symptoms are often dismissed or blamed on ageing, weight gain or unrelated health problems.

Inactivity affects more than just muscles and joints. It slows metab-

olism, contributes to weight gain, raises blood pressure and increases the risk of chronic diseases such as diabetes, heart disease and even certain cancers. Mental health may also take a hit, with reduced physical movement linked to higher rates of anxiety and depression.

Can anything be done?

To counteract the effects of prolonged sitting, experts recommend incorporating at least 20 to 30 minutes of moderate aerobic activity into your daily routine — walking briskly, cycling, swimming or dancing all count. If this initially seems difficult, break it into two or three short sessions across the day. Even five-minute movement breaks every hour can make a big difference. You should aim for 150 minutes a week.

If you work at a desk, stand up and stretch every 30 to 60 minutes. Walk around, spot jog, twist gently from side to side or do a few

squats. Consider using a standing desk or alternate between sitting and standing while working.

At home, try to return to older ways of doing things like standing while cooking or washing dishes, squatting to clean or walking short distances instead of using a vehicle.

Simple shifts like walking while talking on the phone, spot walking or stretching while watching television can imperceptibly reintroduce movement into daily life.

Children and teenagers should be encouraged to play outside. Screen time needs to be limited. Some countries advise screen time of only an hour a week and others restrict phone use under the age of 16.

No matter how old you are, avoid sitting for more than an hour at a stretch. Even gentle yoga or a slow-paced walk helps older adults maintain muscle strength and flexibility.

Ultimately, the key is awareness. We cannot always avoid sitting, but we can become conscious of how long we sit and take steps to interrupt it regularly. Movement is not a luxury or an optional activity. It is vital for our health at every age and stage of life.

Let sitting be a break between activities, not the other way around.

