

COUCH POTATOES ARISE

When most of us think of ways to improve our health and lower our risk for disease, activities like aerobic exercise and resistance training come to mind. But that's really only part of the story. Recently, scientists have begun to recognize that the time we spend doing sedentary things can also have a significant and direct impact on our health.

Specifically, recent studies suggest that adults who exercise regularly, but spend most of their days sitting, whether at work or on the couch, have greater health risks than active people who are more likely to be walking or moving throughout the day.

One Hour at the Gym, Five Hours on the Couch

Recent data from the Nielsen Organization report that a typical American adult watches more than 151 hours of television per month. They also spend 27 hours surfing the Internet monthly and seven hours watching time-shifted television (i.e., DVR, TiVo). And most adults drive their cars to work and sit behind a desk all day. It is clear that all of this time spent doing sedentary activities may partially explain the obesity epidemic in the U.S.

It is becoming clear that even people who have found a way to incorporate regular vigorous activity into their lives should look for strategies to reduce the time they spend sitting or relaxing. Research suggests that people who spend long, uninterrupted periods doing sedentary activities are at the greatest risk. So it may be helpful to look for strategies to break

up the time spent in a low-energy state. Setting an hourly alarm to prompt you to go for a brief walk may help.

More Television = Unhealthy Habits

Additional studies have found that for some people, watching television can also be a cue to snack and mindlessly consume unneeded calories. Furthermore, those who watch more television report consuming fewer fruits and vegetables than those who spend less time channel surfing. That's why it's a good idea to plan ahead and stock up on healthy snacks to nibble on while watching your favorite shows, sporting events or movies. Or better yet, skip the snacks and get up and move around during commercial breaks (just don't head to the fridge).

You might also consider setting daily television and Internet allowances, which has proven to be effective in reducing sedentary time. After all, many of us may watch shows that are of little interest—or drive others crazy by constantly changing the channel—while waiting for something interesting or entertaining to come on. Instead, an evening walk or bike ride would prove to be more enjoyable—and certainly more healthful—alternative to lounging on the couch.

6 Ways to Be More Active While Watching Television

- Throw the remote away and get up to change the channels.
- Walk up and down the stairs (or around the room) during commercials.
- Perform exercises using resistance tubing.*
- Get a treadmill, exercycle or other equipment so you can exercise while you watch.*
- Stand up and iron your clothes.
- Sit on a stability ball instead of the couch.

* see Additional Resources

Additional Resources

Resistance Tubing Workout

http://www.acefitness.org/fitfacts/fitfacts_display.aspx?itemid=2659

How to Design Your Own Home Gym

http://www.acefitness.org/fitfacts/fitfacts_display.aspx?itemid=2588

If you are interested in information on other health and fitness topics, contact: American Council on Exercise, 4851 Paramount Drive, San Diego, CA 92123, 800-825-3636; or, go online at www.acefitness.org/GetFit and access the complete list of ACE Fit Facts.™



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