



BHS Medical Department

What Happens When You Sit Down All Day?

The human body is not designed to sit for a prolonged period of time. Sitting can have short- and long-term effects on your health and body. Most of these effects can be addressed with some changes in day-to-day life.



How is it damaging to sit all day from your head to toes?

1. Weak legs and glutes

If you do not use them, you lose them!

By sitting all day, you are not depending on powerful lower body muscles to hold you up. This can lead to muscle atrophy which is the weakening of these muscles. Without strong leg and glute muscles (responsible for the movement of the hip and thigh) to stabilise you, your body is at risk of injury.

2. Weight gain

Moving causes your muscles to release molecules like lipoprotein lipase, which helps to process the fats and sugars you eat. When you spend most of the day sitting, the release of these molecules is decreased which means you are at greater risk of gaining weight.

3. Tight hips and a bad back

As with leg and glute muscles, your hips and back may suffer from sitting. Sitting causes your hip flexors to shorten, tightening your hips. Your seated position can also hurt your back, particularly if you have bad posture or do not use an ergonomic chair. Poor posture whilst sitting can cause compression on the discs in your spine, and can lead to premature degeneration resulting in chronic pain.





4. Anxiety and depression

Lesser understood than some of the physical effects of sitting, are the mental health effects. However, the risk of both depression and anxiety are higher amongst people who sit the most. This could be due to the reduced mental health benefits of fitness when spending a large proportion of time sitting down rather than moving. These risks could be mitigated with regular exercise.

5. Cancer risk

Prolonged sitting increases your risk of certain types of cancer, including lung, uterine, and colon cancers.

6. Heart disease

Sitting can affect your heart, potentially leading to cardiovascular disease. When you spend more than 23 hours per week watching television, you are at greater risk of dying from cardiovascular disease than those who only watch television for 11 hours. People who are more sedentary are at a higher risk of suffering from a heart attack or stroke.

7. Diabetes risk

People who spend more time sitting also have an increased risk of diabetes. The effects of just five days of bed rest will increase insulin resistance, a precursor to diabetes.

8. Varicose veins

Sitting for long periods of time can cause blood to pool in the legs. This can lead to varicose veins, or spider veins. Though generally not harmful, in rare cases, they can lead to more serious conditions like blood clots.



9. Deep vein thrombosis (DVT)

Deep vein thrombosis is a type of blood clot that is most common in the legs. When part of the clot breaks off, it can cut off the flow of blood to other parts of the body such as your lungs, causing a pulmonary embolism. This is a medical emergency that can lead to major complications or even death. Sitting for too long, even on a long road trip, can cause DVT.

10. Stiff shoulders and neck

As with your legs, buttocks, and lower back, your shoulders and neck will also suffer from prolonged sitting. This is aggravated if you are hunched over looking at a computer screen.

What to do?

- Take regular breaks
- Set an alarm to take a break from sitting every 30 minutes
- Help activate the glute muscles by squeezing them when you are sat at your desk
- Walk around the office or around the house whilst talking on the phone
- Stretch your muscles and joints at home or in the workplace
- Periodically stand, stretch, and frequently change your posture
- March on the spot as you watch television or whilst talking on the phone
- Aim for regular exercise
- Go for a walk
- Run or walk up and down the stairs
- Try an online workout

The more you can move throughout the day, the better. Any type of movement can have a profound impact on the body. The body will burn more calories which can lead to weight loss and an increase in energy. Activity helps with muscle tone, coordination, and mental health which are all important components of living a healthy life.

Ref: Mayo Clinic