

## Sitting on the job

As the workforce has shifted from factories to offices and homes, the incidence of **back pain** has increased dramatically. And researchers blame this increase on one simple activity – sitting.

Our bodies were not designed to sit for long periods. We were made to move. Almost everyone who sits for long periods will develop back pain, even with an ergonomic chair.

Surveys also indicate that about half of all desk bound workers have frequent pain or stiffness in their necks and shoulders, and about 10% of keyboard users experience wrist pain or discomfort.

Your body needs movement to operate effectively. If you have a sedentary lifestyle or sit for most of the day, your body is going to start complaining.

When your muscles contract and relax, like a pump, you assist the flow of blood and lymph fluid. If muscles don't contract regularly the blood in your extremities can pool causing your feet and hands to swell or feel cold.

Long periods of sitting also causes postural muscles, like shoulder groups, to become overworked. These will tend to become short and tight from overuse whereas other muscles like your gluteals and abdominals will become weaker.

## Help for the desk-bound

Make sure you're using the chair to support your body. Aim your sitting bones toward the back edge of the chair as you sit down, for improved back support.

But, also consider this study: Researchers had subjects sit in chairs as they measured tension in their back muscles. After about twenty minutes of sitting, their back muscles started spontaneously tensing up even though the chairs were adjusted to completely support their backs!

Use the 20/20 rule: Take a twenty second break at least every twenty minutes. Use these "micro-breaks" to stand up, stretch out and take a couple of deep breaths.

In the short time it takes to perform this "micro-break", you have released the lock of your visual and mental tasks, stretched away built-up muscle tension and refreshed your body with extra oxygen by expanding your rib cage. You have also improved your posture and increased the circulation of blood through your legs and arms. All this in less than 30 seconds!

If possible vary the tasks you do, throughout the day, so that you don't work at one single activity for too long.

You could also incorporate a regular massage to help get rid of accumulated tension, stretch muscles and improve peripheral circulation.

Lastly, be sure to exercise regularly. It is vitally important that you balance your inactivity with activity. Try some form of gentle aerobics like running or biking.