

# Less Sit and More Fit

*Paul Connolly, Certified Exercise Specialist*

“Sitting is the new smoking.” I remember reading that eye-catching headline a couple years ago in a Runner’s World article and it has stuck with me ever since. Sitting for extended periods of time does significant damage to human health that cannot be undone by exercising. Sitting for several hours each day is bad for you, like smoking is bad for you, regardless of whether you do healthful activities too.

Think about all the technology that has, in essence, “robbed us of movement” over the past fifty years:

Personal computers, video conferencing, “up-loading” music, “downloading” movies, smart phones, TV remote controls, electric garage doors, push button fireplaces, “Googling,” email/ Evites, snow blowers, battery-operated screwdrivers, automatic car starters, and so much more!

I see the consequences of a sedentary lifestyle in my world as a personal trainer. People who sit at a desk/computer for the majority of their workday typically possess a similar host of musculoskeletal issues, including, but certainly not limited to, the following:

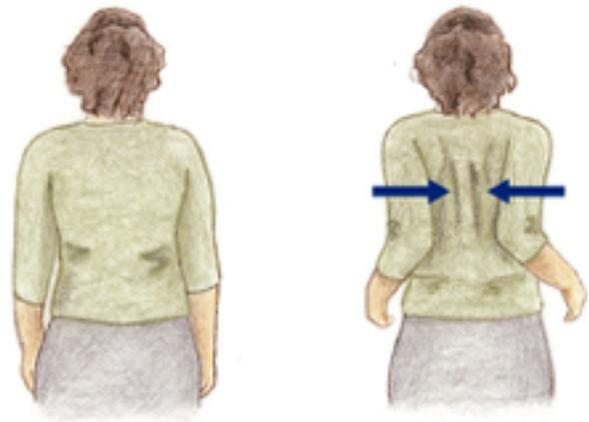
- Weak gluteal (butt) muscles (a mentor of mine once told me, ‘you’re not going to get a strong backside by sitting on it all day’)

- Tight hip flexors (the muscles in the front/upper portion of your hips/thighs)
- Tight hamstrings (back of thighs) (knees bent as in sitting for periods of time shorten the hamstrings causing tightness)
- Poor posture (as a result of rounded shoulders and weak back muscles)
- All of the above contribute to lower back pain

According to Healthy People 2020, approximately 36 percent of adults do not engage in any leisure-time physical activity. Common conditions such as arthritis, poor circulation, and Kyphosis (forward rounding of the spine) can be combated with very basic movements and stretches. The best exercises- all of which can be done at your desk or even utilizing your favorite chair at home- are easy to perform and require very little time. Some of my favorites include:

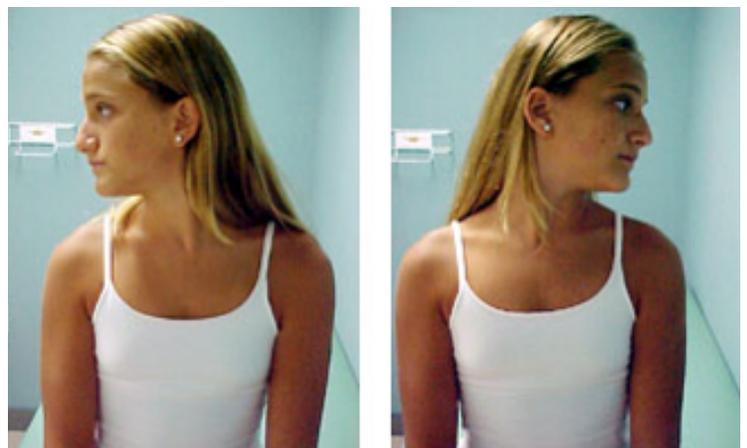
• **Isometric Scapulae Squeezes** —

Sit/stand with perfect posture, keeping chest up tall and looking straight forward; engage your upper back muscles by pinching your shoulder blades together with a strong contraction (**perform [5] 10-second squeezes every hour during your work day**); set an alarm reminder on your computer to prompt you.



• **Cervical Rotations** —

Sit/stand with perfect posture like in the aforementioned Scapulae squeezes; simply rotate your head from side to side, inhaling as you look over one shoulder and exhaling as you look over the opposite shoulder; this exercise stretches your neck and upper back and improves range of motion in your neck (**perform [10] side-to-side rotations every hour during your work day**).



## • Chair Squats —

The simple act of getting up and down from your chair throughout the day is a fantastic way to firm the muscles in the thighs and gluteals. In addition, it is a great way to improve circulation and prevent muscular atrophy (**perform [10] repetitions 2-3 x/day during your workday**).



Executing an easy-to-follow series of exercises, performed in conjunction with changing positions frequently (every 30-60 minutes) are two great ways to help prevent tight and sore muscles, increase flexibility, and take a work break! When we were young and our mothers constantly told us to stop fidgeting in our chairs, they were simply wrong.

Regular constant movement and changing positions are optimal approaches to improve circulation, attenuate Sarcopenia (age-related muscle loss), and prevent low back pain. Taking short walking breaks, holding walking meetings, walking over to your co-worker instead of sending an email, and standing when talking on the phone are simple ways to add movement to your workday. Consider using a standing desk or a riser that you can put on top of a tabletop or desk surface. Set an alarm on your phone or computer to get up and move every hour. Register for MIIA's self-directed activity program **Sit for 60, Move for 3!** Do what you can to prevent the "Sitting Disease!"

We need to keep moving because – and this is a saying I share with my clients all time – *if you rest...you rust!*

*Paul Connolly is certified through the National Strength and Conditioning Association as a personal trainer and possesses a degree in Exercise Science from UMASS-Boston where he graduated Magna Cum Laude.*