

You Might not Want to Park There for Long

by Rich Poll

Are you sitting down? This may shock you.

A Mayo Clinic doctor and teaching physician at Arizona State University came to the conclusion that our chairs are killing us. In fact, he says, “sitting could be worse — that is, even worse for you than smoking.”

During our last staff development day many of us had the opportunity to experience online training from Target Solutions sponsored by the Colorado Special Districts. One of the classes is named “General Office Ergonomics.” It recommends: “Take short rest breaks at intervals. Also called microbreaks or rest pauses, these breaks give you a chance to stand, stretch, and move around, relieving any muscles that have grown over-fatigued from constant use.”

When I entered the workforce in the previous century, no one would have believed that the day would come when employers would actually encourage their staff to take breaks. Well, here we are. The same doctor mentioned above, James Levine, explains: “This is about hard-core productivity. You, and your organization, will be more effective if you appreciate how important this is.”

And just how important is it? “A study by Canadian researchers, published in the *Annals of Internal Medicine*, concludes that too much sitting leads to higher rates of cancer, Type 2 diabetes, high blood pressure, obesity, bad cholesterol and cognitive difficulties.” Bad enough for you? The list goes on — but that should be enough. It is for me. I’m getting up from this keyboard. Right now!

I’m back ... and the irony here is that the solution to the sitting problem is both very easy while it is also very difficult. I’m sure you’ve guessed the easy part. However the difficult part is not just the effort required to develop a change in behavior that

results in a good habit. It is difficult due to the fact of our changing vocational environment.

More than ever, our culture is computer-centered, and that exacerbates concerns for the general population long-term. We tend to not be disciplined. Not many of us save for retirement. Not many of us exercise. Not many of us eat well.

So, if I still haven’t scared you into making some serious effort at getting up and stretching, consider this simple remark from Dr. Levine: “*Sitting all day is not natural and to blame for all kinds of ailments.*” How about this: Print his statement and pin up so that you see it while you look at your computer screen.

What else might help? The same writer who mentioned the Canadian study results above says: “For those of us who work at desk jobs, take microbreaks every 20 minutes or so.” Given some time to chew on it, you’ll figure out all sorts of ways to work this into your daily routine.

Bottom line: Brief consistent spurts of activity are way better than prolonged inactivity.

Dr. Levine wrote all of this up in a 240-page book that we have in the PCCLD collection and so far it has had a pretty good run here. There are six copies of *Get Up! Your Chair Is Killing You and What You Can Do about It* floating about our district.

A Nielsen audience measurement systems report in 2015 found that the average adult over 18 spent roughly 10 hours a day looking at a screen. (By comparison, we get the equivalent of 17 minutes a day in exercise.) Also, seven out of ten Americans take a prescription drug; of these, one in four women in their 40s or 50s takes an antidepressant, though studies show that a short walk in the woods can do as much good for some of them. That’s worth a try, but only if you take it seriously.

You got the message. You know what to do. Now start moving! In fact, you might want to read *Get Up!* during those microbreaks.

<rich.poll@pueblolibrary.org>
March 31, 2017

—
Adapted from:

“Is Sitting Down in Chairs Damaging Our Health?”
by Mary MacVean (*Pueblo Chieftain*, Aug 5 ‘14,
p6A)

“Make A Stand: It’s the truth: Too much sitting can
be hazardous to your health” by Amy Matthew
(*Pueblo Chieftain*, Sep 1 ‘15, p9A)

“Beyond Human” by D.T. Max (*National
Geographic*, May ’17, p63)