

Stand up...for your health

 By [Howard Rybko](#)

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What do IT workers and astronauts have in common? They both age up to ten times faster than normal...

To be totally accurate, instead of IT people, I should have said all workers who spend their day in front of a computer screen. If you spend long periods of time sitting on your behind in front of a monitor, read on! Your health may depend on it.

Did you know astronauts age ten times faster when in space?

Yes, it is true. In space, astronauts lose bone density, muscle mass and their heart outputs decrease ten times faster than normal. And that's not all, male testosterone levels drop faster than the Zim Dollar and both sexes suffer from eyesight deterioration and delayed healing.

They even look older after long missions!

Dr Joan Vernikos, a former Life Sciences Director of NASA says that "After the long Skylab missions in the early 70's, many medical observers commented that the astronauts were growing old in space." Weight gain, dizziness after standing up, sleep difficulties, tiredness and muscle wasting are some of the physical effects they suffer from upon their return. Any of these sound familiar?

Did you know that all it takes is a few days in bed to become an astronaut?

In the 70's, NASA had volunteers spend up to a week in bed, in an attempt to simulate weightlessness. The volunteers soon started suffering from the same problems as those experienced by the astronauts in space.

Researchers eventually realised that these changes were related to general inactivity, which is where us chair bound workers come in. Sadly, from a physical point of view, sitting in a chair closely mimics the weightlessness of space.

Did you know that sitting all day and then hitting the gym does not help?

Every astronaut has exercised in space. They have used all kinds of equipment from rubber stretch bands to spin bikes as well as various training routines. In fact some Russian astronauts have exercised up to four hours a day. But it still does not help.

The same applies to you. You can't make up for 8 to 12 hours of sitting by hitting the gym for an hour. The bad news is that the hour at the gym simply does not make up for all that inactivity.

Remember that sitting, in itself, is not bad for you. It is sitting for extended periods where the danger lies.

Sitting for long periods makes you sick

As you sit for extended periods, without taking regular breaks, your body starts to deteriorate. This causes you to age faster and makes your muscles shrink. It may even affect your sleeping patterns.

Worst of all it can make you fat!

A number of medical studies have shown that sitting reduces fat burning in the body. In fact, some researchers have pointed to extended sitting as one of the major causes of the obesity epidemic.

What you can do about it?

This is the easy part.

It does not matter if you are a couch potato or a full-on skin and bones marathon runner, you need to take steps to protect yourself.

All you have to do is to stand up once every 15 to 20 minutes.

Nothing else is required. You don't have to run up and down flights of stairs, jog on the spot or do squats. Just stand! You can stretch or walk around your desk if you want, but that is all that is necessary.

A recent medical study showed that standing three times an hour is better than 30 minutes in the gym. So taking these micro-breaks will translate into a big benefit for your health. I am not for a minute suggesting that you give up exercise. What I am suggesting, is a simple change to prevent you from sitting too long without a break.

There are a number of freeware programs out there that will remind you when to take a break. I use one and cannot believe how often I lose track of time and need to be reminded to stand up. Search for "microbreak software" to see some of these kinds of utilities.

ABOUT HOWARD RYBKO

Dr Howard Rybko, who despite 20 years in IT, still has an interest in the medical field. He has recently authored a weight loss book - The Decarb Diet & Lifestyle - which has guided many to a healthier life using a low carbohydrate strategy
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