

Is there a relationship between sitting long hours and sleep?

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The evidence is now pretty clear that the more you sit, the higher your risk for chronic diseases such as cardiovascular disease, diabetes, and some cancers. It turns out that this risk is independent of your level of exercise. Researchers call this the “active couch potato” syndrome when individuals regularly exercise but also have jobs and lifestyles that keep them in their chair the majority of the day.

What about sleep? We know that regular exercise can improve sleep quality, but can we improve our sleep simply by sitting less? There is surprisingly little research that has explored this to tell us one way or another. We do know that we are all constrained by the same 24-hour day, so spending a lot of time doing sedentary pursuits such as watching television or using the computer, leaves us with less time to do other healthful activities such as sleep or even exercise. We also know that people that sleep more and report better quality sleep also report better overall health and quality of life. Turns out that people that sit less report these same qualities...perhaps there’s a connection!

How much sitting is too much? While there isn’t a clear guideline here, a recent study found that people reporting four hours or less sitting per day were less likely to have cancer, diabetes, heart disease, and high blood pressure. This same study also found a “dose-response” relationship, suggesting that there isn’t a magic number of hours of sitting, but rather no matter how much time you spend sitting, sitting less is helpful.

To reduce sitting, you may consider the following:

- Watching less television or dual-tasking household activities during your favorite show
- Consider leaving your desk to talk with your co-worker instead of sending the email
- Take frequent breaks to stretch your legs and stay fresh

It may indeed be that sitting too much may impact sleep quality since it impacts a number of other important health factors. This effect may be independent of how much exercise you do. There’s a simple message to follow: move more, sit less, sleep better!

National Sleep Foundation. 2013. Retrieved on March 13, 2015 from <http://sleepfoundation.org/sleep-news/is-there-relationship-between-sitting-long-hours-and-sleep?page=0%2C1>