

Stay Fit While You Sit!

By Molly Householder, CPT and Wellness Director, Westminster Village

Are you one of the 88 percent of Americans who sit a majority of the day at your job? Are you over the age of 60 and spend, on average, nine hours of your waking time being sedentary? If so, let's look at ways you can stay fit while you sit!

According to a recent public health survey, nearly half of all jobs in the 1980s required physical activity. In 2012, less than 20 percent of the jobs required the same amount of physical activity. With the increase in mass transportation, desk-related jobs, and a growing baby boomer population, people are spending way too much time sitting down. If you sit more than six hours per day, you are more likely to develop chronic diseases like high blood pressure, heart disease, diabetes, and even cancer, not to mention the strain you are putting on your back and lower body. If you are working a desk job or are suddenly limited to a wheelchair or a more sedentary lifestyle due to injury or illness, don't fret just yet. There are ways to keep your body healthy while you sit.

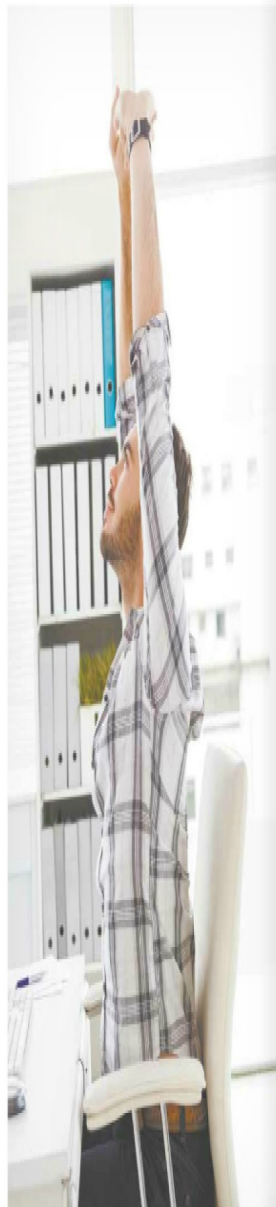
First off, let's talk about the value of a good stretch. Stretching your muscles can benefit your body in many ways and most stretches can be done in a seated position. Stretching causes you to breathe deeply bringing oxygen to your brain, in effect waking you and your muscles up after long periods of sitting. Stretching also releases physical stress that is stored in your muscles and promotes more energy. Along with stretching, it is important to get up and move for at least five to 10 minutes every hour.

Here are a few tips to remember before doing any stretches:

- Breathe deeply and slowly while stretching.
- Stretch to the point of feeling a release of tension but not to the point of feeling pain.
- Hold each stretch for 10-30 seconds or more if it feels good.
- Go slow and gentle while stretching — try not to rush through your stretches.

Here are stretches you can do right at your desk, in a wheelchair, or in any sturdy chair:

- Reach your arms up toward the ceiling and as far back as you can safely go.
- Reach your one arm overhead and to the opposite side. You can keep the other hand on your hip or in the air. Repeat with the other arm.



- Straighten one arm out in front of you. Now with the other arm pull the straight arm toward the opposite shoulder. If you use a computer mouse a lot during the day, this should feel really good.
- With good seated posture, twist in your chair keeping your hips stationary. Twist all the way from your lower back up to your head, looking over your shoulder.
- Place your hands around the front of your knee or under your leg, just above your knee, and pull your leg towards your chest. Repeat with the other leg.
- Cross one leg over the other so that your ankle rests just above the knee. While doing this, lean forward to feel a nice stretch in your hip and buttocks. Repeat with the other leg. Over time this exercise can help with lower back problems and sciatica.

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In addition to stretching, try to incorporate strength training and cardiovascular exercise into your seated program.

- Strength training exercises can be done with the use of a resistance band or dumbbells to focus on upper body strength. Bicep curls, shoulder presses and tricep extensions are a few good exercises to start with.
- The cardiovascular part of your seated routine should incorporate lower body and upper body movements at a lighter resistance and slower pace. Try knee raises, leg extensions, air punches, and arm raises in a rhythmic beat pace to get started.

There are many positive physical and emotional benefits of consistent exercise. These benefits are even more important for people who are limited due to injury, disability, illness, weight problems, or advanced age. It is always important to talk to your doctor before beginning any new exercise routine. Remember that your chair does not have to be your enemy. If you are stuck in a chair at work or for any other reason, you can still get fit while you sit!

For more information, please contact Molly Householder, CPT and wellness director, Westminster Village, at 309-863-6474 or info@westminstervillage.com.

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