

Keeping your health and wellbeing in the know

# MyHealthTALK

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Courtesy of Asset Health



## Rx FOR BETTER HEALTH - SIT LESS, SLEEP MORE

When we think of people spending most of their day sitting, it brings to mind couch potatoes, junk food and too much television. Most of us know that long hours sitting in front of the telly muddles our minds and racks up the pounds. Too much sitting zaps our energy by putting our bodies into shutdown mode.

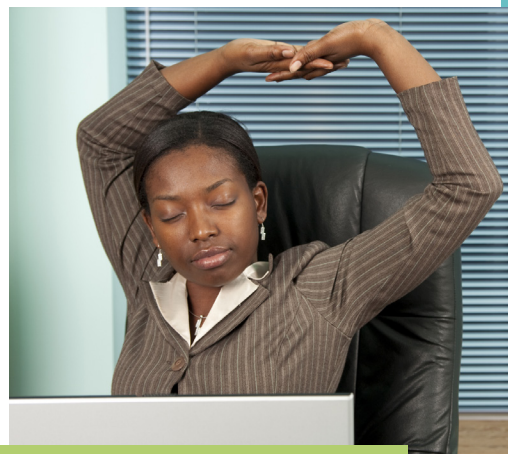
What many of us may not know is that too much sitting may double our risks of dying prematurely. A new study suggests the more we sit each day, the greater our risks for cancer, diabetes, heart disease and other chronic health problems. Not only should people who sit on living room couches heed this alert—it's just as relevant for those of us sitting for hours at computers. Researchers from Kansas State University report potential dangers for office workers, truck drivers and others who spend much of their day sitting. Authors of the study conclude that people should move more to reduce the risk of chronic disease. Taking regular breaks to walk, stretch, or exercise your eyes reduces potential health risks and can help you live longer.

"A lot of office jobs that require long periods of sitting may be hazardous to your health..." said Richard Rosenkranz, assistant professor at Kansas State University. "We saw a steady, stair-step increase in risk of chronic diseases the more participants sat. The group sitting more than eight hours clearly had the highest risk."

Meanwhile, a study by Britain's Surrey Sleep Research Centre finds that sleeping fewer than six hours, several nights in a row, can cause molecular genetic changes that affect a person's wellbeing. An estimated 30 percent of American workers report getting too little sleep, according to the federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

Professor Derk-Jan Dijk reported that among healthy adults, those who had less than six hours of sleep each night over the course of a week experienced changes in messenger RNA genes linked to inflammation, immunity and stress. He said the changes could increase risks for obesity, diabetes, heart disease and brain function.

Fortunately, there are simple solutions to habitual sitting and sleep deprivation. Stretching and taking physical breaks—including eye breaks—when sitting, and getting adequate sleep on a regular basis are



*New studies on the potential, lethal risks of sitting too much are as relevant for people working at computers as for those considered couch potatoes.*

an investment in your most valuable asset—your health. Take good care of your health by encouraging co-workers to join you in taking enough breaks to reduce your health risks.

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### simple solutions

**STAND AND STRETCH.** Make it a habit to get up and stretch your muscles for a few minutes once every hour, or set up a standing workstation.

**WALK.** Take a walking break.

**BLINK MORE.** Practice blinking or use lubricating eye drops when working at a computer. Staring at a monitor causes you to blink less, which dries out your eyes.

**EXERCISE YOUR EYES.** Look around the room or focus on something in the distance every half hour.

**CLOSE YOUR EYES.** Rest and lubricate your eyes by closing them for a few minutes.

**DEVELOP GOOD SLEEP HABITS.** Establish regular bedtime and wake-up schedules and follow them daily.

**GET COMFORTABLE.** Create a relaxing bedtime routine, making certain that your room is comfortable, quiet and dark. Avoid eating or exercising within two to three hours of bedtime.

# WRESTLING WITH WOLVES

You have two wolves inside of yourself, fighting each other. One wolf represents your good habits, and the other, your bad habits. Which wolf wins the battle? *It's the one you feed.* It's easier to break a bad habit when you stop feeding the bad wolf.

Last month, this newsletter focused on why it's difficult to break bad habits and why you should continue trying. Unhealthy habits are hard to break because they trigger the brain's pleasure center and release the 'feel good' chemical, dopamine. Follow the suggestions listed below and let your brainpower and self-control feed your good wolf!



## Tips for Breaking BAD HABITS

**Avoid** tempting situations, people, places and things that trigger your habit. If you always stop for a donut or sugary latte on the way to work, try a different route. If having a drink with friends triggers your desire for a cigarette, avoid the occasion. Keep fatty foods, cigarettes, alcohol and other tempting items out of your home.

**Prepare** mentally. Think about how you want to handle temptation, and practice what you plan.

**Build** motivation to stay on track. Think about short and long-term consequences of continuing with the bad habit. Write down the benefits of breaking it, including the consequences for family and friends. Review your benefits daily to stay motivated.

**Replace** the bad habit with a good one. If you smoke cigarettes, chew on carrot or cinnamon sticks instead. If you overeat, plan a healthy diet and measure

your portions. When you are tempted to indulge in your bad habit, go for a walk instead.

**Tackle** only one bad habit at a time. Consciously focus on your new behavior and make it a habit.

**Reward** yourself for small and big steps. Give yourself a healthy treat when you've achieved a goal or milestone.

**Enlist** support. Tell family and friends about your habit and efforts to break it. You'll be more accountable if others are asking about your progress.

**Stay** motivated and don't let a setback derail you. Setbacks are to be expected; they are part of the change process. Learn more about yourself and your habit if you have a setback. Adjust your goal if need be and continue on the road to improved health.