Is Sitting Dangerous?

Sitting is something we all do, but rarely stop to question – is this good for my health? Because of advanced technology many occupations nowadays do not require the average working professional to move from their office or cubical. Whether it be an email, fax, scan, or even an important meeting – there is very little moving in today’s society – aside from finger and wrist movements to coordinate the keypad and computer mouse.

So how in the heck does this relate to health and fitness? – Because there is very little movement during the work day, and before and after for that matter, less calories are being burned; and with the consumption of so many processed foods – people are gaining weight at an enormously fast rate. Two-thirds of American citizens are now overweight or obese – that’s over 200 million people in this country alone.

Even when you are not performing something active such as running, swimming, or strength training – your body still needs energy to function. We get that energy through calories in foods – proteins, fats, and carbohydrates. A calorie is a unit of measurement to measure the amount of energy in food. For example – an apple has approximately 80 calories; a McDonald’s Big-Mac has approximately 1,200. It takes approximately one calorie to fuel the body in a sleeping state for about one minute. Every bodily function – from the slightest movement of the limb or digestion takes energy to execute – i.e. calories. But sitting is one of the easiest positions and actions for your body to fuel – because there are not many movements happening while in that state. This means that it takes less energy for your body to function each day. But as previously stated, with the poor nutrition in America today – people are consuming much too many calories than their bodies need to function – so the excess calories are being stored as body fat.

It takes approximately 1,313 calories to fuel the body of a 45 year old man at 5 feet 8 inches tall weighing 150 pounds in a state of little movement.( Actions such as walking up the stairs, exercising, or even taking out the trash increases that number.) If this person has a desk job, does not exercise, takes the elevator to his office, and drives to work each day – the number of calories needing to be consumed to function each day will not be drastically higher than that previously cited number. So what if this man has bad nutrition which easily leads him to consume 2,500 calories per day – an excess of approximately 1,000 calories? One pound is equal to 3,500 calories – so in less than 4 days – this person will have stored one pound of excess energy in his body – mostly in the form of body fat.

Another issue that I have seen in clients of my own directly related to long lengths of time sitting each day are is lower back pain. One of the chronic issues we see at Fitness Together is sciatic nerve pain. The sciatic nerve runs from your lower back down the side of your leg. If a person sits with bad posture for long lengths of time – the lower back muscles will become inflamed, which will pinch the top of the sciatic nerve and cause pain from the back down the side of the leg towards the knee. This pain can be quite severe if the issue is not attended to.

In addition to this particular lower back issue – sitting with bad posture for long lengths of time in a position where the spine is flexed and out of its natural position I.e. in a “hunchback” state – the muscles of the upper back at the site of the shoulder blades can also become inflamed and cause pain from the middle back all the way to the neck.

What can we do to prevent this? As scary as this article may seem – there are ways to prevent this from happening to you through the work day.

Sit on a stability ball at work – this burn approximately

Take the stairs to your office – this is an easy way to burn calories

Take a 5 minute walk around the office a few times per day – this will increase the amount of calories being burned and get your body out of the flexed position of sitting.

Tilt your rearview mirror up – this will make sure you are sitting with good posture while driving. Often times, posture will falter in the car, but if the rearview mirror is tilted up – when you go to look, you will not be able to see – forcing you to sit up straight and get the spine back in its natural state.

Make sure your shoulder blades are against your chair – Similar to above, this will make sure your spine is in its natural state – helping to prevent lower and upper back pain.

So with all of the tough news in this article, the good news is doing these simple remedies take very little time and can save you lots of pain and discomfort! Doctor’s visits for lower back pain can take up a lot of time and the co-pays can add up; keeping the lower back in the front of your mind during the day, will keep you pain-free and productive.