

We need to break up with our chairs this Valentine's Day



Two in three Australians don't realise exercise can't solve sitting health risks

Australians know too much sitting is bad for us but stay glued to our rears regardless – and mistakenly believe exercise will protect us from the associated health risks, according to a new report based on a survey of more than 1000 Australians.

Releasing the results ahead of Valentine's Day, the Bluearth Foundation's MoveMoreSitLess health promotion initiative urged the community to reconsider the unhealthy relationships most of us have – with our chairs.

Bluearth CEO, Wendy Gillett, said fewer than one in three Australians correctly identified that 30 minutes of exercise a day does not protect you from the ill effects of a sedentary lifestyle.

"Our love affair with our chairs has got to end – we need to break up with our chairs or, at the very least, stand them up more often," she said.

"That's a message that all of the MoveMore SitLess supporters – including the Australian Physiotherapy Association and the Institute of Sport Exercise and Active Living – have got behind. We'd also urge employers to play their part by joining the movement and pledging to become a Move More Sit Less organisation.

"Exercise is good, and to be encouraged, but exercise alone is not enough. Better is, to exercise and break up long periods of sitting and best is to do all that and make sure you are moving through the day.

"The good news is that there are lots of ways to move more and sit less, and that those people who actively did try to break up long periods of sitting found it left them feeling more productive, refreshed, happier and more relaxed."

Active living expert from Victoria University's Institute of Sport, Exercise & Active Living, Professor Stuart Biddle, said the evidence that prolonged periods of sitting is harmful to health is strong, and yet the average Australian spends nine hours a day sitting down.

"People who sit a lot have a measurably higher risk of early death, and a higher risk of heart disease, type 2 diabetes and cancer. Why? The body 'shuts down' while sitting – a bit like being weightless in space – and it's thought that sitting slows the body's metabolism, reducing our ability to regulate blood sugar and blood pressure, and to burn fat."

Wendy said moving more need not be complicated or expensive: "Standing desks are great, but you can move more at work even if you have a normal desk. We've got lots of tips on our website to get Australians moving more."

Tips for sitting less... at work:

Use one of many apps available which can send you a reminder to get up and move for a minute or two every half hour

Stand when you talk on the phone, or greet visitors

Use a bathroom on a different floor, or a printer that's further from your desk

Get rid of the bin under your desk

Institute a standing break between each agenda item at meetings, or have a standing/walking meeting instead

Drink more water – you'll need to move to re-fill your glass, and to visit the toilet

Grab lunch from a venue that's further than your usual, or walk your sandwich to a park

Talk to colleagues in person instead emailing

Use the stairs

Tips for sitting less outside work:

Make it a family rule not to drive for anything within one kilometre of home

Stand up during TV ad breaks, or do ironing as you watch

Stand at your kitchen benchtops instead of using stools

Limit screen time for both children and adults; use a timer to make sure that you stick to it

Prioritise outings that involve movement e.g. ten pin bowling, dancing, playing pool...

Walk or ride to school or, if that's not possible, park the car further from the gates

Choose to stand on public transport – even if seats are available

For more information, see movemoresitless.org.au #movemoresitless

About the report:

The report was based on a survey of 1032 Australian adults which was conducted in 2015, and was designed in consultation with Bluearth board member Professor of Kinesiology at the California State University East Bay Dr Jeffery Simons and Professor Stuart Biddle of Victoria University's Institute of Sport, Exercise & Active Living. It aimed to measure: Awareness of the risks associated with sedentary behaviour

Perception of people's own sedentary behaviour

Feelings around sitting

Results were collated by IBISWorld, with further analysis performed by Professor Biddle.

Results in brief:

31 per cent correctly identified that 30 minutes of physical activity a day is not enough to keep you healthy if you live a sedentary lifestyle the rest of the time

19 per cent of people initially reported sitting 8-11 hours a day, where 33 per cent sat that much when they added time spent sitting at home, at work, commuting and during meals

80 per cent wanted to sit less

53 per cent regularly actively tried to break up long periods of sitting – and reported that the breaks left them feeling refreshed

68 per cent said that sitting less at work could 'definitely' improve their wellbeing

62 per cent felt less productive after long periods of sitting

98 per cent had heard that extended periods of sitting was not good for health

About Bluearth Foundation

Established in 2000, Bluearth is a national health promotion charity working to improve health through increasing our levels of physical activity and movement. We want to reduce the burden of disease and unhealthy outcomes from sedentary living. Traditionally we have focussed on children, but have extended this to adults with our new MoveMoreSitLess health initiative.

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