

Is Sitting For Long Hours at work the new Smoking?

Dr. Michael Jensen, from the Mayo Clinic (April 22, 2014)

PITTSBURGH (NewsRadio 1020 KDKA) – The average worker spends over five hours and 40 minutes sitting at their job every day and a new study says it's bad for your health, with some claiming the long-term effects of sitting can be as bad as smoking.

Dr. Michael Jensen, from the Mayo Clinic, joined KDKA Radio's Larry Richert and John Shumway to talk about a study he and his colleagues conducted.

To find out whether the test subjects in the study were sitting or not, Dr. Jensen says one of his colleagues, Dr. James Levine, invented underwear that can "tell whether you're sitting, standing, or lying down essentially every half second of the day."

With the data they gathered and studied, they came to the conclusion that people need to move around more. Dr. Jensen says they found, "that people who are overweight tend to spend a lot more time sitting than people who have not gained weight."

Dr. Jensen says that a trip to the gym for 30 minutes or an hour may not be enough to combat all the time spent sitting.

"It's not going to prevent risk for disease and weight gain if that's all you do is go to the gym for 30 minutes or an hour and spend all of the rest of your day sitting."

According to Dr. Jensen, "sitting is independently associated with greater risk of dying of heart disease [and] diabetes, even when you try to account for exercise."

What is the solution to this? Dr. Jensen and his colleagues say that standing at work at least part of the time has positive health benefits. The doctor admits, "that there certainly are people that have trouble with their legs, and it's not going to be practical for them to be standing up a lot." But he adds, "thankfully, most people can spend more time standing and not suffer from it."

There are studies that claim prolonged sitting is responsible for 49,000 cases of breast cancer and 43,000 cases of colon cancer in the United States. Those are startling numbers, but Dr. Jensen says you should take some of those studies, "with a grain of salt."

He says, "unlike the [study we] did where we objectively measured sitting, standing and walking, many of [the other studies] are self-report." A self-report relies a lot of the test subjects own reports.

He adds that the information gathered in a self-report, "tends to be bias and [the subject] may overlook a number of things that go into [the cause]. For example, people who sit a lot may have a number of other unhealthy lifestyles that [makes] it impossible to take account for."

The bottom line is that less time spent sitting at work may help you reduce the risk of certain diseases.