



# Get Moving

Sitting deemed as bad as smoking.

by Kindra Gordon, field editor

**F**arm and ranch work certainly requires an ample amount of physical activity, but in today's modern world it also involves a lot of sitting — in the pickup, in the tractor, at a computer.

Health professionals are now warning that sitting — or being sedentary for several hours a day — can “shave years off your life.” In fact, the latest buzz phrase is that “sitting is the new smoking.” The comparison is being made namely to get people's attention, but also because health professionals want people to realize that sitting can be as harmful to our health as smoking. Plus, it's a habit within our physical capabilities to stop.

Not only are researchers finding that being sedentary is detrimental to our heart, new research suggests brain function slows as we sit for longer periods — especially with age.

A study published earlier this year in the *Journal of Physical Activity and Health* said sedentary behavior could increase the odds that, after age 60, individuals may face a 46% greater probability of suffering some level of disability in performing ordinary daily skills.

Sitting too long has also been linked to an increased risk of developing high blood pressure, high cholesterol and diabetes, which may also increase cancer risk.

Most health professionals agree that rigorous exercise is important for this reason: On a molecular level, cells are always turning over; new cells are always being created. Because of these continual body changes, exercise is an important part of helping provide cells with the energy, oxygen and blood flow needed to regenerate.

Specifically, exercising to a level that boosts heart rate also boosts natural antioxidants that kill cell-damaging free radicals that may cause cancers.

## Exercise is the best medicine

The American Heart Association (AHA) suggests that to reverse sedentary health effects, individuals find ways to include swimming, jogging, walking at a moderately fast pace or even gardening in their daily lives.

An August article in the *American Journal of the American College of Cardiology* looked at the benefits of exercise, and concluded that runners may add another three years to their lives. Even a slow-paced run for just five to 10 minutes a day may be beneficial, they suggest.

In his book, *The Exercise Cure*, Jordan Metzl, a sports medicine physician at New York's Hospital for Special Surgery, says, “Exercise is the best preventive drug we have.”

Numerous research studies show that exercise reduces the risk of early death, helps control weight and lowers the risk of heart disease, stroke, type 2 diabetes, depression, some types of cancer, cognitive decline and hip fractures. It can also help improve sleep, memory, concentration and mood.

Plus, ongoing research is adding more benefits to the list. One recent study found that some moderate exercise may help relieve treatment-related pain among some breast-cancer patients. Another study showed that physical activity may be as effective as medication in preventing early death in people who have had heart attacks or strokes.

Federal data suggest that, currently, only about 21% of adults in the United States meet the recommended amount of daily aerobic and muscle-strengthening exercise — which is at least 30 minutes a day of moderate-intensity physical activity in bouts of at least 10 minutes.

The National Cancer Institute conducted a study that found that fewer than 5% of adults in the United States get at least that much exercise daily.

The bottom line: Make sure you're moving every day — and rather than a leisurely stroll, make sure you get your heart rate elevated when you exercise, emphasizes Metzl. This may mean picking up the pace when you walk or adding short bouts of running or a few jumping jacks.

While 30 minutes of daily exercise is recommended, three 10-minute bursts of physical activity throughout the day can be equally as effective.

For individuals with a daily desk job, health experts recommend taking breaks to walk or stretch every hour. The new standing desks may also offer an alternative with some improved health benefits for neck, back and heart. Standing instead of sitting can also burn off 40 more calories per hour.

**Editor's Note:** Kindra Gordon is a freelancer and cattlewoman from Whitewood, S.D. 



## **Mayo Clinic research reveals movement benefits**

James Levine, an endocrinologist at the Mayo Clinic, is among the researchers who promotes finding ways to add standing and movement to your day. His research began with the age-old health question: Why do some people gain weight and others don't.

For Levine's research, a group of office workers who engaged in little routine exercise were monitored. They were put on an identical diet that contained about 1,000 more calories than they'd been consuming previously, and they maintained their minimal exercise habits. Despite the standardized diet and exercise regimens, some participants gained weight, while others stayed slim.

Using clothing stitched with sensors to measure every subtle movement, the Mayo research discovered that the participants who weren't gaining weight were up and walking around, on average, 2.25 more hours per day, even though all of them worked at (sitting) desks, and no one was going to the gym.

Levine and his colleagues concluded that finding every opportunity to move throughout the day is key. Additional research even suggests that sitting all day and hitting the gym or going for a run after hours is less effective at maintaining (or losing) weight than simply moving throughout the day.