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Sitting For Less Than 3 Hours a Day Could Increase Life Expectancy

Prolonged Daily Sitting Linked to 3.8% of All-Cause Deaths

A new study in the American Journal of Preventive Medicine found that sitting for more than three hours per day is responsible for 3.8% of all-cause mortality deaths. Investigators also estimate that reducing sitting time to less than three hours per day would increase life expectancy by an average of 0.2 years or 72 days.

In order to properly assess the damaging effects of sitting, the study analysed behavioural surveys from 54 countries around the world and matched them with statistics on population size, actuarial table and overall deaths. Researchers found that sitting time significantly impacted all-cause mortality, accounting for approximately 433,000, or 3.8%, of all deaths across the 54 nations in the study. They also found that sitting had higher impact on mortality rates in the Western Pacific region, followed by European, Eastern Mediterranean, American, and Southeast Asian countries, respectively.

Figure 1

Prevalence of sitting time (>3 hours/day). Data of 54 countries from 2002 to 2011.

“It was observed that even modest reductions, such as a 10 percent reduction in the mean sitting time or a 30-minute absolute decrease of sitting time per day, could have an instant impact in all-cause mortality in the 54 evaluated countries, whereas bolder changes (for instance, 50 percent decrease or 2 hours fewer) would represent at least three times fewer deaths versus the 10 percent or 30-minute reduction scenarios,” explained lead investigator Leandro Rezende, MSc, Department of Preventive Medicine, University of Sao Paulo School of Medicine.

Researchers now believe that periods of moderate or vigorous physical activity might not be enough to undo the detrimental effects of extended sitting.

See also: Are You Still Sitting Down?

“Although sitting is an intrinsic part of human nature, excessive sitting is very common in modern societies,” commented Rezende. “Sedentary behaviour is determined by individual, social, and environmental factors, all strongly influenced by the current economic system, including a greater number of labour-saving devices for commuting, at home and work, and urban environment inequalities that force people to travel longer distances and live in areas that lack support for active lifestyles.”

The results of this analysis show that reducing sitting time, even by a small amount, can lead to longer lives, but lessening time spent in chairs may also prompt people to be more physically active in general.

“Reducing sitting time might be an important aspect for active lifestyle promotion, especially among people with lower physical activity levels,” emphasized Rezende. “In other words, reducing sitting time would help people increase their volumes of physical activity along the continuum to higher physical activity levels.”

The public health burden of prolonged sitting is real. Accounting for 3.8% of all-cause mortality in this study, sitting is shortening the lives of people across the world.

“The findings support the importance of promoting active lifestyles (more physical activity and less sitting) as an important aspect for premature mortality prevention worldwide, and therefore the need for global action to reduce this risk factor.”

Try the 'Sitting Calculator' to estimate the time you spend sitting daily and see the results

Reference:

Leandro Fórnias Machado de Rezende, MSc, Thiago Hérick de Sá, MSc, Grégore Iven Mielke, MSc, Juliana Yukari Kodaira Viscondi, MSc, Juan Pablo Rey-López, PhD, and Leandro Martin Totaro Garcia, MSc (2016) "All-Cause Mortality Attributable to Sitting Time: Analysis of 54 Countries Worldwide". American Journal of Preventive Medicine, ahead of print, Volume 50, Issue 8 (August 2016), DOI: http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.amepre.2016.01.022

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