

The Dangers of...Sitting (Really!): 3 Key Antidotes

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It seems hard to believe that something as simple and passive as sitting can put your body at risk. But indeed, just as water is an amazing transformational force on a landscape – even mountains – over time, so too can the long-term effects of sitting include major changes in your muscles and joints. Unfortunately, unlike the stunning canyons and other structures of our water-sculpted natural wonders, the changes caused by sitting aren't so wonderful. In fact, they can be a leading cause in debilitation!

Fortunately, there are some easy yet effective remedies you can use to negate this effect. But it helps to first understand why they are needed:

Sitting puts the body in a state of flexion. Your legs are flexed forward from the hip joint, and your trunk is flexed at the waist. This forces your back, namely the erector spinae muscles, into a constant state of overstretching, causing weakness, fatigue and even soreness in your low back. Adding to the problem is that your legs' position also shortens your hip flexors, namely the iliopsoas muscle, which now means the front of your leg and hip is tight and inflexible. This in turn causes two major problems: it restricts your ability to fully extend your leg and hip behind you, which forces you to alter the position of your pelvis when you walk; and it pulls on your lumbar spine, since the iliopsoas actually attaches there. All of it translates to more stress on an already-stressed low back. Finally, sitting with your knees bent keeps your hamstrings shortened, which – you guessed it – contributes heavily to tight hamstrings. And tight hamstrings, like a tight hip flexor, put pressure on the low back, due in part to once again needing to alter your pelvis when you go through certain daily movements.

All of that, and I haven't even touched on the compression of the spine caused by poor posture (think "crunched down") when we sit!

Now that you have an idea of the primary problems caused by sitting, here are the three remedies to offset them:

1. **Exercise and extend your low back** with gentle, but effective, yoga postures and similar stretches: The most classic example of these is the Opposite Arm/Leg Reach, performed either on your stomach or on hands and knees. This can – and ideally should – be done every day.
2. **Stretch your hip flexors:** An example of this is the Kneeling Crescent Pose.
3. **Stretch your hamstrings:** So many options! If nothing else, the Supine Hamstring Stretch will help get the process going.

Bonus: Since sitting also exacerbates our body's exposure to repetitive stress – in this case, of constantly being oriented around forward/backward positions, a well-performed twist and also some form of side stretch can round out your "antidote for chronic sitting"!

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