

Sitting

Sitting is a demanding task. Most people do not view it this way because it seems so easy. Easy, that is, until they have a back problem.

Several things happen to the body when you sit:

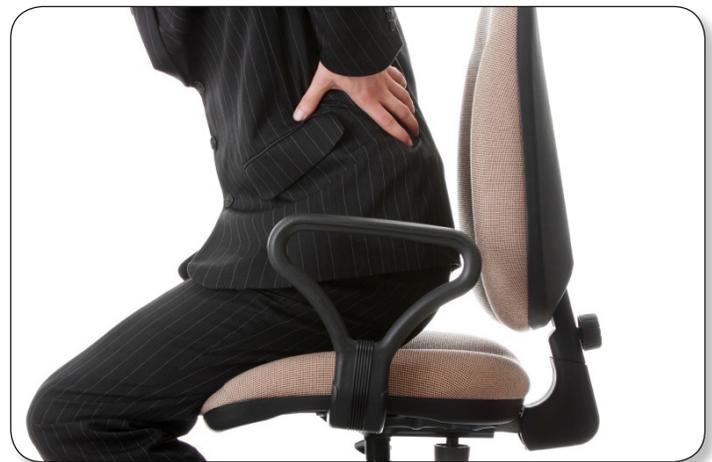
The pressure on the back increases. This is because the legs no longer support the weight of the upper body. In addition, many people sit in a slumped posture. This moves the spine out of its three natural curves and adds more pressure to the back.

Circulation is altered. Movement of blood through the body relies, in part, on muscle movement. Muscle contraction forces blood back to the heart. You may notice how your hands swell when they are left relaxed at your sides or your feet swell when you sit for a long time. This is because limited movement allows blood to accumulate in the hands and feet.

Not enough movement. Movement is the key to healthy sitting. Everyone wants to know the best position for sitting. There are better or worse postures, but try not to think in terms of best. Watch little kids when they sit. They keep moving around. This is because they are listening to what their body needs—movement for comfort. This may be too much movement for an adult in a work environment, but the same principles apply.

So what are better ways to sit? There are a few principles that can help, particularly if you do need to stay in one position for a while:

1. Keep the feet flat on the floor or on a foot support.
2. Keep the three natural curves in your spine.
3. Use the backrest to rest your back.
4. Try to keep the shoulders relaxed. Let the arms swing freely and try not to hold the arms/shoulders up for extended periods of time. This is a lift and can become quite fatiguing when performed all day.
5. Move frequently during the day. Take a few seconds periodically during the day to change positions or stand.



SITTING

Talking Notes

POINTS TO REVIEW

1. Sitting is more demanding than most people think.

It is interesting that a number of occupations, such as bus drivers and office workers, experience a large number of back injuries despite the fact that they do limited lifting. The reason is that sitting places increased demands on the spine. People often sit for long periods of time without compensating for these demands.

2. The trick to healthy sitting is to move.

Watch a child sit. They move around all the time. Sitting still is difficult for them because they are paying attention to what their body wants to do—move! When adults sit, they often stop listening to their body until it is time to stand up, and by then they are stiff and uncomfortable. By simply performing brief stretches or standing for a few seconds, the demands of sitting can be significantly reduced.

3. Keep in mind the power position when sitting.

Keep your head over your shoulders and the three natural curves in your back. In this position, the body is balanced on all the structures of the back. When a person slumps, the body is no longer balanced and the weight of the upper body, including the head, forces the muscles of the neck and back to work inefficiently.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. Why is sitting for long periods of time a demanding task?
2. What are some simple steps for reducing the demands of sitting?
3. Why do children have trouble sitting still for a long period of time?

This information is for general informational purposes only and is by no means exhaustive or all-inclusive. It is not intended as medical or professional advice, nor to replace consultation with a doctor, physical therapist, or other health care provider (HCP). Please check with your HCP before beginning any activity described in this material. If you experience discomfort, pain, or injury during any activity, stop and consult your HCP before continuing. State Fund does not warrant the accuracy of any information provided herein nor assume any responsibility or liability for your use of such information. Your use of any information provided herein is entirely at your own risk.