

# Sitting at desk for 9 hours a day raises risk of early death

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**Sedentary behaviour was linked to a higher risk of early death** CHRIS RATCLIFFE/GETTY IMAGES

Sitting still for nine and a half hours a day raises the risk of early death, a study has found.

Middle-aged and older people who live sedentary lives are up to two and a half times more likely to die early, researchers said. The risk remained even if sitting was broken up by standing and walking, typical of a desk-based job.

Light activity such as cooking or washing-up could help lessen the risk. People who did regular physical activity of any intensity were about five times less likely to die early than those who were not physically active.

The study, in *The BMJ*, analysed existing research on physical activity and mortality in nearly 36,400 adults aged 40 and older. Participants had an average age of 62 and were followed for an average of just under six years, during which time 2,149 died.

Their activity levels were monitored at the start of the research using devices that track physical movements and were categorised into “light intensity” such as slow walking, “moderate activity” such as brisk walking, vacuuming or mowing the lawn and “vigorous activity” such as jogging or digging.

After adjusting for potential influencing factors, researchers found that any level of physical activity, regardless of intensity, was associated with a substantially lower risk of early death.

Deaths fell steeply as total activity increased, before plateauing. People who did light intensity activity for about five hours a day, or moderate to vigorous activity for 24 minutes a day had the most health benefits.

There were approximately five times as many deaths among the 25 per cent of least active people compared with the 25 per cent most active.

Researchers looked separately at sedentary behaviour and found sitting still for nine and a half hours or more was linked to a higher risk of early death. The most sedentary people, who spent an average of nearly ten hours a day sitting, were at a 163 per cent higher risk of dying before they might have been expected to during the period of the study than the least sedentary, who sat for an average of seven and a half hours.

Ulf Ekelund, of the Norwegian School of Sport Sciences in Oslo, who led the research, said: "Our findings provide clear scientific evidence that higher levels of total physical activity, regardless of intensity, and less sedentary time are associated with lower risk of premature mortality in middle-aged and older people."

Researchers from Germany and New Zealand said that the study was an important addition to existing knowledge but could not explain whether the distribution of activity across the day or week was relevant. It did not show whether being sedentary and physical activity were independent risk factors or "two sides of the same coin".

They added: "The clinical message seems straightforward: every step counts and even light activity is beneficial."

Commenting on the research, Jess Kuehne, of the Centre for Ageing Better, said: "If we want to be healthy and independent when we grow older, we need to do much more in our forties and fifties. As well as aerobic exercise like taking brisk walks, cycling or swimming, we also need to be boosting the strength in our muscles and bones and improving our balance.

"It's not just about adding years to our life, it's about adding life to our years and increasing the time that we stay fit, healthy and free from long-term health conditions or disability."