Don’t just sit there....

New research that analyzed and distilled the findings of 47 studies concludes that those of us that sit for long hours (8+ hours a day) raise our average risk of cancer, kidney disease, obesity, cardiovascular disease, disability, type 2 diabetes, depression, and early death—even those who exercise regularly! (However, the association was more pronounced among people who do little or no exercise.)

Potential Excuses as to why you will skip reading this article:

“I don’t live an unhealthy lifestyle” The amount of time spent sitting was found to drive up health risks independently of other factors that would often contribute to poor health and which are also linked to sedentary behavior, such as smoking, age and obesity. That suggests, for example that although long hours spent sitting might indeed contribute to weight gain, it is probably harmful even if it doesn’t make you obese.

“I exercise every day!” Exercise helps—but not entirely. Unfortunately, the metabolic effects of sitting outweigh the benefits of regular exercise. Daily exercise can reduce the unhealthy effects of sitting by about 15%. So, even if one exercises regularly for an hour a day, how one spends the remainder of that day is also very important to one’s health.

Specific things to do:

The first step is awareness; monitor your amount of sitting (car, desk, couch, dinner table)— and try to reduce it by realistic increments each week. Wearable monitors can help with this. Next, incorporate breaks into prolonged sitting and, of course, exercise—while it is not a cure-all—it helps negate some of the damage of sitting for most of the day.

At work:
- Stand up or walk around for a minute or three once every half an hour.
- Encourage walking meetings.
- Take a quick walk during one of your 15 minute breaks or incorporated into the end of your lunch hour.
- Have spontaneous wall-sit competitions in our workspace with your co-workers.
- Get fit at your desk. UCLA has great “iworkout” videos you can do right at your desk!

At home:
- Don’t zoom or zone through commercials— stand, walk around, stretch or do a few sit-ups or push-ups.
- Talking on the phone?—walk and talk!
- Establish a routine of walking after dinner (this has the added benefit of delaying evening sitting time).
- Leave the chair at home: Walk or stand during youth sporting events, stand for open lectures, dance or sway at concerts.
- Stand and Deliver—don’t email people in your own office or text people in your home with you.
- Exercise daily. Especially if you can’t reduce your sitting time because exercise mitigates some of the damage of prolonged sitting.

Bottom line: It’s not just enough to be active—it’s also important to sit less. We need to think about sitting and exercise as two separate behaviors, each contributing on its own to our health. So while that 1 hour jog is great for you, it is not undoing the 8 hours sitting at your desk.