

## The Killer Chair...and how to vanquish it!

According to leading obesity researcher, Dr. James Levine, your chair will kill you. A dire statement indeed. In his work as head of the Obesity Clinic at Arizona State University and the Mayo Clinic and his collaboration with a research group studying diabetes, he's performed scientific studies that show just how harmful prolonged periods of sitting are to the human body.

Systolic blood pressure, glucose, triglycerides, HDL cholesterol, insulin are all adversely affected by sitting too much. If you're working out to the prescribed guidelines for fitness...but then sitting all day... you are known to researchers as "physically active, yet highly sedentary...an *Active Couch Potato*." Ouch.

Given this information, and the long hours we sit in the dispatch community, it'd be normal for you to think, "Oh, I am so [insert favorite expletive here]!" The good news? Not necessarily. Because the same studies that show how bad sitting is ...also show *you can offset the bad stuff* by breaking up your sitting time with *small bits of activity*. *This may even be as **small as the transition from sitting to standing or from standing to beginning to walk***. If you're talking about combating obesity, in other words... losing weight... here's another key concept: *It doesn't matter how you burn the calories as long as you burn them*. This is separate from having aerobically fit cardiac and pulmonary function but it's a step in the right direction because it begins the process of lowering blood glucose levels, cholesterol, blood pressure...all the things that are adversely affected by being sedentary.

Thus the title, and content, of Dr. Levine's new book, "Get UP!" Physiologically, humans evolved to be active, in his book he notes that we've only been a sitting society since around the time of the industrial revolution. He actually coined the phrase, "Sitting Disease," in 1999. So what do you do about it? This is actually where the *calories out* part of the equation comes into play. Dr. Levine recommends what he calls a N.E.A.T. approach. N.E.A.T stands for Non-Exercise Activity Thermogenesis. Fancy language for "all the calories you burn doing stuff other than a workout." A person can burn up to 200 calories an hour by walking at the leisurely pace of one to two miles per hour depending on their individual basal metabolic rate. But what does this actually look like in real life? Well, in the 60 corporations that have had Dr. Levine revolutionize their offices it looks like indoor walking tracks around the desk areas, treadmill desks, sit/stand desk setups and corporate culture that understands if you're walking around talking to someone you might actually be having a work meeting and not slacking. And his studies show the difference between people in a sedentary environment who aren't obese and those who are is two hours and fifteen minutes of N.E.A.T. per day.

Sure, you say, but how does that help me in my communications center? Good question. In my center, we're solitary dispatchers with a 13' by 6' area in which to move. For me it's a mini exercycle that fits under the desk. It means I try standing up and pacing around ten minutes every hour. I stand when I'm reading. I now wash the dispatch floor with greater exuberance! And I use one of my half hour breaks to walk laps around our town offices/fire station complex accompanied by a portable radio in the event

the firefighter covering me needs to go out on a call. Now... I *do* understand that breaks can be nearly as elusive as the mythical unicorn so whatever N.E.A.T. looks like for you and/or your center is going to be very different. Maybe it's as simple as wireless headsets so you can at least stand up and pace around when you don't have a call, especially if you don't have a sit/stand desk setup.

But think about it. If you could use a mini exercycle every day at work and you cycled enough to burn 400 calories a day over five work days, that's 2000 calories. That's two thirds of the way to burning off an entire pound. Multiply that by how many weeks you work a year and you're on your way to shedding some serious pounds.

I was a television director/technical director in my previous career which means I sat during my eight hour shift and sat for a two hour commute for over 20 years. I'm probably the typical "Active Couch Potato" because I did 45 minutes of aerobics five to six days a week and my weight kept creeping up despite that. Reading the studies has been an eye opening experience and I hold the personal opinion that as a community dispatchers need to start quietly making changes. Ones that convert our sedentary selves and our work spaces...maybe one by one... to places where we can fit N.E.A.T. in and overcome what Dr. Levine calls, "Sitting Disease," and I've heard called: "Dispatcher's Disease." Change that helps the current generation get a little more healthy and reconstructs the future so new generations stay that way.

**NEXT UP: *Let's Talk About Stress, Baby.***