

HEALTHY LIVING

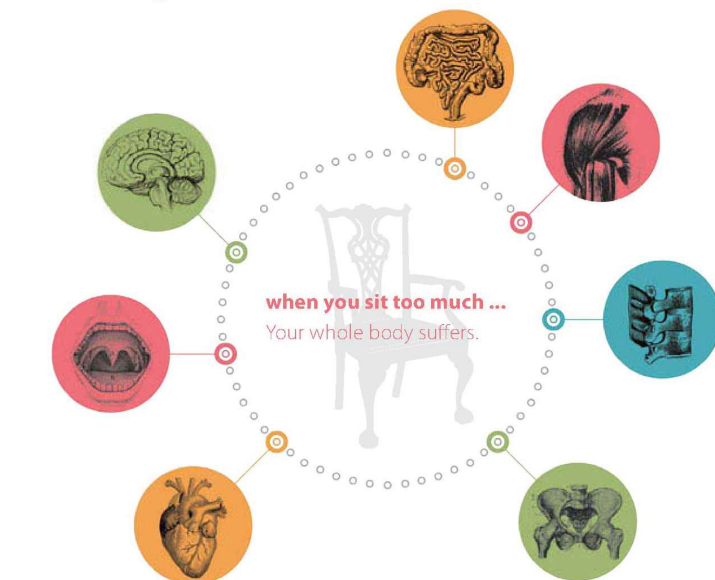
Don't just sit there!

There's plenty you can do to stop yourself from getting sitting disease. **Here's a round-up of ways to make sitting safer**

By Clio Stevens

“Sitting is killing you.” Warnings like this keep hitting the headlines, making us shudder in our seats. We now know that our inactive ways leave us vulnerable to health trouble like obesity, diabetes, heart disease and cancer, while also cutting our lives short. But when it seems like our modern lives are conspiring to keep us on our bums, all-day sitting often feels inescapable. It turns out, though, that outsmarting our chairs is actually doable.

Good news: we don't need to completely give up sitting to protect our health. “Sitting per se isn't dangerous – everyone should sit,” reassures Dr Genevieve Healy, a disease-prevention researcher from the University of Queensland and the Baker IDI Heart and Diabetes Institute, Australia. It's those marathon sitting sessions that are causing the problems. We use minimal energy when we're seated, and our leg and back muscles don't contract very much. This can slow the clearance of fat and sugar from our blood, increasing our chances of weight gain, diabetes and heart disease, Dr Healy explains. This is only one of the



possible explanations for excessive sitting's health-wreaking effects.

So the antidote is to sit less and move more. Our bodies are designed to be active, says Harvard professor of human evolutionary biology Daniel Lieberman. Two million or so years ago, we spent our days searching for food, and this kept us on our feet. It was nothing for the average hunter-gatherer woman to walk 9km every day, and the average man those days clocked up about 15km of walking and running daily, Prof Lieberman says. The need to hunt and gather no longer drives us to stay on the move, but every part of us – including our brains – still depends on us staying active day-long.

How much is too much?

Although she was one of the first to highlight the importance of limiting prolonged sitting time for heart health and she's spent several years searching for ways to defend the desk-bound, Dr Healy can't say exactly how much sitting pushes us into the danger zone. “We don't know how much *total* sitting time per day is too much; however, our research is currently trying to understand how much sitting *at one time* is too much.” Uninterrupted stretches of sitting – like when you're on deadline and feel reluctant to leave your screen even for a bathroom break – are especially risky. Dr Healy and her team are still trying to figure out how often we should break up sitting