

Office Worker's Dilemma

Sedentary life leading to physical inactivity is a hallmark of most of the chronic diseases. A growing body of research shows that long periods of physical inactivity raises one's risk of obesity, heart disease, diabetes, certain cancers and many other chronic diseases. Each one of these diseases can make patient's life and that of care provider's very difficult. However, it is well known that most of these conditions greatly improve with regular physical activity and loss of excessive weight.

Many office workers find it difficult to indulge in physical activity. Those who indulge in regular sporting activities are lucky and remain generally healthy. There are those who have to undertake physical exercise because of their financial situation, no other choice but to walk or cycle to work. For some it may be a blessing in disguise, because they have to work as farmers, labourers or any other job requiring long hours of physical activity. But for most of us, who work in offices, shops and hold other sedentary jobs, have to make an effort to find time and place for physical activity. General picture is of procrastination and a miss for any effort to spend some time exercising. Sedentary life is often sitting or lying down, reading, watching television and socialising, spending time on mobile phones or computers, so called the *chilling* trend. This type of lifestyle also matches well with burgers, pizzas and creamy cakes adding to our already high intake of sugars, salt and fats. Weight gain continues to creep up and controlling it becomes very difficult, if not impossible.

I am reminded of two incidents with colleagues related to weight problem. One of my colleagues, who happened to be a health education officer, asked me one day that his doctor had advised him to lose weight because of high blood pressure and that he was finding it difficult to do so. I asked him about his diet and discovered that like me, he also loved rice and a lot of it too, and found it difficult to reduce the amount at each meal. I suggested that he should cook his rice with a lot of water and discard the excess water once rice was cooked. On our next meeting, few weeks later, he profusely thanked me for the advice and informed me that he had lost considerable amount of weight. Another colleague came to me and asked what he could do for his knee, which was hurting a lot on walking. One look at him revealed that he probably had quite a bit of extra kilos on him. My response was that that he was certainly overweight and that probably extra weight was causing his knee to hurt. He did tell me that he wants to go to the gym to work out and to reduce weight, but often fails to do that because of not finding enough time. Our office was on the eleventh floor and I told him that I had made it a habit to walk up the stairs to my office to complete my daily minimum requirements of exercise. Would he try to do the same and see if it helps his knee? He took up the challenge and after a few weeks he looked visibly healthier; thanking me for my advice he informed me that his knee was fine. To this day he climbs up to his office and have had no need to go to the gym! Both my friends must have taken other measures as well, but the advice certainly helped. I must hasten to add that weight reduction is not all that simple and requires mental strength, hard work and persistence.

Busy office workers all over the world face difficulties to find time and opportunity to do essential exercise but we often fail to spot opportunities to indulge in our daily physical activity. Ample of opportunities are there and a few simple ones are mentioned here:

Brisk Walking: Experts point out that 30 minute brisk walking (1Km in 10 minutes) daily is sufficient for an adult to keep healthy. It could be easily a lunch time walk outside office. It is a refreshing activity for both our body and mind; read more....

<https://www.webmd.com/fitness-exercise/features/is-walking-enough#3>

Walking up Stairs: This is something we have everywhere, offices, escalators in airports, railway stations or super markets, most small and tall buildings and even in our homes. Even one or two floor walks, several times a day, during office hours can go a long way to help. Stairs can be used to go up and down, as much as needed, to complete one's requirement of daily exercise. Moreover, apart from a little time, it is totally free;

Long Weekend Walks: It is recreational to have a nice long walk at least once, over the weekend. Walk to markets, join hash groups, camping and the like are activities that may be interesting and rewarding;

Cycling and swimming: Cycling and swimming are excellent way to keep fit. Weekends are a good time for it, if no free time during the week;

Household Chores: Even household chores like cleaning, vacuuming, gardening, mechanics work all add up to your physical activity;

I guess **disco and dance** should be added to this list.

Physical exercise only helps 20-30% in reducing extra weight. The main culprit is food we eat. What goes into our stomach is significant. Needless to say that one has to at least burn as many calories as one takes in. Type of food and quantities consumed today determine the state of our overweightness. Awareness for obesity in the world is being recognised and more and more people are being told about the adverse effects of obesity on our body. Our desire to eat, even when not hungry and taste for certain foods drives us to it and it is very difficult to resist what is presented to us. On top of this; excess sugars, salt and fats are adding chaos in our lives. A sedentary worker does not need more than two moderate meals a day, but at least three meals are considered a norm with few snacks thrown in. Inactivity has been described as "one of the biggest" challenges in health. What is crucial is to recognise the problem and each one of us have to address the problem for ourselves and those around us.

Some related facts:

Office inactivity: 2.4kg estimated amount of weight that can be lost by standing up for an extra 30 minutes a day for a year

- **37%** of men spend less than 30 minutes a day up on their feet at work
- **45%** of women spend less than 30 minutes a day up on their feet at work
- **50%** regularly eat their lunch at their desk

Source: Get Britain Standing and British Heart Foundation

Q: How fast is fast enough? A: 100 Steps per minutes. Ref. <https://bjsm.bmj.com/content/52/12/776>

Body Mass Index (BMI) is the best way to assess your weight. To calculate your exact BMI value, divide your weight in kilos by your height in meters, then divide again by the same

number (height in meters).

BMI = Weight in Kilos/(Height in Meters*Height in Meters) e.g. 65Ks/(1.70*1.70)=22.5

- Below normal: <18.5
- Normal weight: BMI of 18.5 to 24.9
- Overweight: BMI of 25 to 29.9
- Obesity: BMI of 30 or higher

Waist size: Women with a waist size of more than 35 inches and men with a waist size of more than 40 inches may have higher chances of developing diseases related to obesity.

Some Relevant Links:

Dr Raja Bhat addresses the problem of overweight in a simple way

http://www.rajabhatmd.com/images/Diet_Advice.pdf

Dr Anthony Lim - An Introduction to a Whole-Food, Plant-Based Diet is worth watching

[**An Introduction to a Whole-Food, Plant-Based Diet - a presentation by Dr. Lim**](#)