

Sedentary Death Syndrome

Several years ago, while visiting a Control Room, I had a lengthy conversation with a female Controller who had over ten years of experience at her console. The room where she and her colleagues worked was small and the lighting was dim. She lamented that the cramped quarters had negatively affected her mood. There wasn't a place to walk during her break, nor any exercise equipment available. She felt resigned to sit in her chair throughout the duration of her twelve-hour shift.

While some Controllers believe they are limited in their ability to move their bodies while on the job, others simply don't want to. In fact, many people make the choice to remain inactive and live a sedentary life. Because of technology, automation, and other modern conveniences, the majority of our population has become increasingly sedentary. Physically active jobs now make up less than 20 percent of the workforce in our country. As a result of our more sedentary lifestyles, Sedentary Death Syndrome (SeDS) has become a major threat to public health. Even children suffer health risks associated with inactivity and obesity.

Continuous sitting can have detrimental effects on health that include heart disease, Type 2 diabetes, peripheral vascular disease, cancer and premature death. Less serious outcomes include arthritis, depression, and muscle aches. Even if you exercise on a regular basis, sitting for hours at a time can have grave consequences, long-term. To mitigate the risks associated with sitting, make the effort to stand at least once an hour and walk or move around. Pipeline Performance Group provides Alertness Exercise cards to clients participating in our Fatigue Risk Management course. The card includes eight movements that address every major muscle group in the body. It was designed for Controllers and others who stay seated for long stretches of time. Each of these movements can be done without leaving the console.

My new Controller friend asked for suggestions to remedy her sedentary situation. She didn't like how her body was changing or the feelings of lethargy. We looked at the Alertness Exercises and she agreed they were something she could easily do while monitoring the pipeline. I described each exercise and stretch and the benefits associated with them. She said she felt more alert mentally and more relaxed physically after doing the movements. She was excited about having something easy yet valuable to share with her colleagues because she believed it would help them too.

Building health is best done incrementally. Make a choice or two each day to build your health in some way. Set a reminder on your phone or fitness app to move every hour. Take a short walk while on break and longer walks on days off. Movement builds your respiratory and cardiovascular systems which helps prevent serious health issues.

Move more each day, each hour. Don't allow a preventable disease to keep you from enjoying your work, your family, and the opportunity for a long life.

