



The Understanding Feldenkrais Series Surviving Chairs, Losing Weight

Ralph Hadden
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Sitting puts muscles into a sort of hibernation, cutting off their electrical activity and shutting down the production of lipoprotein lipase, the enzyme that breaks down fat molecules in the blood. Your metabolic rate drops to about one calorie a minute- just slightly higher than if you were dead.

This is from the research of Dr James Levine at the Mayo clinic in Arizona. Sitting in chairs, it seems, is the new smoking. Or is it obesity? I have long advocated getting out of the chair- sitting on the floor, working at a standing desk, walking along the airplane corridor and so on.

I have run many classes on “Surviving Chairs”, with the aim of reducing back and neck pain and injury, but it seems there is a weight control aspect as well. More and more evidence is emerging of the real dangers of sitting. Dr Levine is a leading researcher in the field of ‘inactivity studies’ and is the author of *Move a Little, Lose a Lot* (Crown 2009).

Levine argues that to be healthy and lose some weight you don’t need to grind out an hour at the gym but could simply start by spending more of your day on your feet. (He suggests in the introduction to his book that you read it either standing up or pacing.)

I’m quoting from an article in *The New Yorker* where I found all these startling research findings. The article, *The Walking Alive*, May 20th, 2013 is by Susan Orlean and describes her experience of accustoming herself to working at a treadmill desk. Yes, it’s a raised desk with walking treadmill attached so you can walk at a slow, steady pace while working. She says it works for her- she has got used to tapping away at her computer while walking and she is fitter and healthier than she has been for years.



A certified Feldenkrais practitioner and a member of the Australian Feldenkrais Guild Inc, Ralph brings 38 years of knowledge and experience to classes, workshops and individual consultation

Ralph Hadden BA. (CFP) themovingmind@bigpond.com 0425 742 048



More from Orleans's article on Levine's research:

'Sitting for more than two hours causes the presence of good cholesterol to drop, and, in time, insulin effectiveness plummets. This can lead to cardiovascular problems, certain kinds of cancer, depression, deep vein thrombosis, and type 2-diabetes. There is even speculation that being moderately active- that is, not sitting- can delay the progression of pre-dementia to dementia.'

And:

'A University College London review of studies done between 1970 and 2007 of close to half a million people showed that walking reduced the risk of cardiovascular events by thirty-one percent, and it cut the risk of dying during the period of the studies by thirty-two percent. For women, sitting is especially unhealthy: *women who sit more than six hours a day die at a rate that's forty percent higher than that for women who move more.*' (my italics)

What's my take on it all?

1. Avoid chairs as much as possible. Sit on the floor, walk while talking on the phone, have standing staff meetings (cuts down on time-wasting). There are times when sitting in chairs is unavoidable- in the workplace, in the car and so on- but when you have a choice, make the most of it. Sit on the floor to watch TV, to play with your children/grandkids/nephews/nieces, to eat a meal (on a low table, like they do in Japan, where the incidence of back pain is much lower than the West). Floor sitting is still sitting, but you tend to move around more, change position more often, when you are on the floor.
2. If you must sit in a chair, sit upright at the front of the seat, feeling your ischial tuberosities (your sit bones at the base of the pelvis) providing you solid skeletal support, have your feet flat on the ground. Or shift right back in the seat so the chair back supports you in an upright position.
3. And give yourself relief from the sitting position as much as you can- before, during and after- by lying on the floor, standing up to stretch and walk around or just wriggle around in your chair.

For more about strategies for surviving chairs, see the articles from my newsletters: *Sit on the Ground with me*, October 2003 and *The Chair at Work*, October 2004.

These articles can now be accessed on TheMovingMindCentre.com
Goto Resources on the main menu and click on the archive tab.



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