

Four years ago, I wrote an article titled “Beware the Chair” in a FITNESS HEALTH column for an innovative Florida magazine www.drwmag.com. Lately, there have been articles in Businessweek www.businessweek.com, WebMD www.webmd.com, and other publications about the harm that sitting does. One headline named the chair as America’s public enemy No. 1. Hardly, but it is an ever-present problem. The average American spends over 8.9 hours each day sitting, most of it in a chair. That is a recipe for disaster.

This isn’t news; it has become an issue in the mass media because of the obvious connection between sitting and obesity. To paraphrase Ella Wheeler’s poem: sit and the world sits with you; stand and you stand alone. In fewer than 150 years, we have gone from an agriculture-based standing and moving society to a service-based sedentary society. Humans evolved over millions of years mainly because we could stand, run, and jump. What’s next now that we mostly sit?

Remember Dickens’ “*A Christmas Carol*”? Bob Cratchitt certainly didn’t sit. He stood most of the day at a lectern-type stand, doing accounts for Scrooge. For centuries, architects and draftsmen stood at their tilted desks; today, almost all their work is done on computers, so even designers and architects are now hunched over a screen. Most labor-saving devices are at odds with our long-term health.

There’s nothing that says you have to sit. I’m typing this article standing up, using a Bluetooth connection, five feet from the screen. Standing lets muscles relax, allowing improved blood and oxygen flow, while permitting joints to do their load-bearing job. Standing is a low-intensity activity requiring modest energy output while providing outsized benefits.

There are two types of functional muscle movement: phasic and tonic. Phasic activity is mechanical, moving the body around on command; tonic is structural, postural, working automatically 24/7 to maintain the body’s straight line of gravity. Phasic muscles aren’t used when we sit for long periods. Tonic muscles do all the work and become tight and exhausted, doing a job they were not designed to do. Sitting overworks a few, poorly equipped muscles all day, while the ready-to-work muscles atrophy.

Muscle imbalances cause most pain that affects load-bearing joints. Sitting pushes us further into pain. Sitting in a chair all day adds unwanted pounds and pushes us towards poor circulation, muscle atrophy, joint pain, and a myriad of other, easily preventable conditions. Sitting puts all the weight on the pelvis and spine, with the heaviest pressure on the low back.

According to Businessweek, annual sales of swivel chairs are over \$3 billion, each manufacturer obsessed with lumbar support as the solution. It’s not. And spending \$700 for an Aeron chair won’t make it so. What about those ball

chairs that the alternative health sites sell so vigorously? They don't work; they force your back into a C-curve, which you can do on your own in any chair. Telling you to sit up straight while using a ball chair isn't the answer either. How does that put any weight on the legs or take weight off the pelvis? It doesn't.

What to do? All offices and homes have chairs that look and act like chairs. We like them; they're comfortable. So we stay in them for long periods. But, there is a way out of this mess.

- Organize your office and home around standing and moving, not sitting. Most of us have organized our kitchens around moving, bending, lifting, reaching, and not sitting. Why not sort out the rest of the house? There really isn't an alternative to perching or standing. Sitting hurts us, so let's minimize it.
- The best alternative is perching, half-sitting and half-standing, keeping weight on the legs while maintaining the S-curve. An inexpensive stool with the front half tilted forward will work. Hospitals and rehab clinics use this and so do I. It's not stylish, but it's cheap and it works.
- The Swopper, a more elegant, expensive, and "bendy" stool, will help you perch. I haven't tried the pricey Capisco Perching chair/stool but it puts weight on your legs and permits the full S-curve to flourish. It looks cool, too.
- Finally, here's an antidote to the harmful effects of sitting. It's a simple exercise called Getting Up & Down. Go to www.bodyfixmethod.com and then to Articles. Print out the PDF and do it everyday. Give me your thoughts at: bill@bodyfixmethod.com. Be well.