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The Most Dangerous Thing You'll Do All Day

Men's Health

By Bill Phillips and the Editors of Men's Health
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We stand around a lot here at *Men's Health*. In fact, a few of us don't even have office chairs. Instead, we write, edit, and answer e-mails—a lot of e-mails—while standing in front of our computers. All day long. Why?

It all started last summer, when Assistant Editor Maria Masters came across a shocking study in the *Medicine & Science in Sports & Exercise* (one of dozens of research journals we comb each month as we put together the magazine). Scientists at the Pennington Biomedical Research Center in Louisiana analyzed the lifestyles of more than 17,000 men and women over about 13 years, and found that people who sit for most of the day are 54 percent more likely to die of heart attacks.

That's right—I said 54 percent!

Masters immediately called the lead researcher at Pennington, a professor named Peter Katzmarzyk. Turns out, this wasn't the first study to link sitting and heart disease. Similar research actually dates back to 1953, when British researchers found that (sitting) bus drivers were twice as likely to die of heart attacks as (standing) trolley operators.

Here's the most surprising part: "We see it in people who smoke and people who don't," Katzmarzyk told Masters. "We see it in people who are regular exercisers and those who aren't. Sitting is an independent risk factor."

In other words, it doesn't matter how much you exercise or how well you eat. If you sit most of the day, your risk of leaving this world clutching your chest—whether you're a man or woman—as much as doubles.

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This raised a rather obvious question: Why? Truth is, the researchers aren't sure. But Marc Hamilton, Ph.D., one of Katzmarzyk's colleagues, suspects it has to do with an enzyme called lipoprotein lipase (LPL), which breaks down fat in the bloodstream and turns it into energy. Hamilton found that standing rats have ten times more of the stuff coursing through their bodies than laying rats. It doesn't matter how fit the rats are; when they leave their feet, their LPL levels plummet. Hamilton believes the same happens in humans.

Still sitting? Then you should know that your office chair also:

1. Screws up your posture. The fascia, the tissue that connects individual muscles into a full-body network, begins to set when you stay in one position for too long, says *Men's Health* advisor Bill Hartman, P.T., C.S.C.S., a physical therapist in Indianapolis. If you're hunched over a keyboard all day, this eventually becomes your normal posture.

2. Makes you fatter. This happens for two reasons. First, you burn 60 more calories an hour when standing versus sitting. But more importantly, says Hartman, when you spend too much time sitting, your largest muscle group—the glutes (a.k.a. your



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