



Health

Don't just sit there, get moving – and give a thought to bypassing that labour-saving technology. By Paula Goodyer.

Standing start

If you don't remember office life pre-computers, it went something like this: get out of chair, walk to filing cabinet, pluck document from file and walk to photocopier, make copy, return original to filing cabinet, walk to colleague's desk and hand them a copy, walk back to desk. Post-computers, tasks that took more than 100 steps to accomplish can now be done with a couple of mouse-clicks.

To fight the sedentary lifestyles contributing to so much chronic disease, Martha Lourey-Bird, scientific adviser to Weight Watchers Australia, says we need to start taking "long cuts" instead of short ones. "We have to create more inconvenience in our lives. Make your workspace as inconvenient as possible so the waste-paper basket and printer aren't within easy reach, for instance. If it's 10 steps there and back to the printer and you do it five times a day, that's 100 steps you wouldn't otherwise have done," she says.

These minor movements count. When researchers at the Mayo Clinic in the US compared the movements of lean people to those of obese people, they found a big difference. Lean people spent an average of two hours a day on small, spontaneous movements such as getting up and down, pacing, lifting their arms and generally fidgeting. The additional movement chewed up 1460 kilojoules a day, which is as much as a 30- or 40-minute walk.

It's moving around, not just standing to do tasks, that counts, says exercise physiologist Chris Tzar, manager of the Lifestyle Clinic at the University of NSW. He's not convinced of the benefits of chair-free classrooms, for example. The strategy, where students stand at desks rather than sit, has been trialled in the UK and the US as a way to combat obesity. Compared to sitting, standing burns about an extra 62 kilojoules an hour, he says. Using stairs more often, on the other hand, delivers a bonus – climbing stairs burns up 2.7 times more kilojoules than walking on level ground.

What also helps counteract sedentary living is to catch yourself sitting, adds Lourey-Bird. "I get people to add up how many hours a day they spend sitting, then suggest they reduce their sitting time by 10 per cent. If you sit for 450 minutes, for instance, try to find ways to replace 45 minutes of that time with moving instead."

