

Lloyd's Wellbeing Centre

Sit less, stand more!

Tips for staying physically healthy when working from home or at the office

Following the introduction of our new [COVID-19 Policy & Procedures](#), we are pleased to announce that **the Lloyd's Wellbeing Centre is now open again for in-person appointments.**

Brought to you by the Lloyd's Wellbeing Centre in association with our expert health and wellbeing partner, Thrive4Life

Working from home over the last few months has meant that many of us have become more sedentary, particularly as we are spending more time sitting down each day.

As workplaces start to introduce new social distancing policies, fewer employees will be allowed back to the workplace at the same time. For many of us, working from home may become a new way of life for at least several more months to come. However, whether working from home or returning to the office, it's important to understand the negative effects of prolonged uninterrupted sitting.

Research focusing on the effects of uninterrupted sitting have found that sitting for hours each day increases the risk of disease. Dr Bailey, a sedentary behaviour specialist at Brunel University London says, *"even if you are someone who is moderately active ...this might not protect you from sitting down too much."*

So, what are the health risks of sitting down for long periods of time?



Effect on your heart

Multiple studies have confirmed that sitting for long periods is linked to increased risk of heart disease.

The link between illness and sitting first emerged in the 1950's when a study reported in the Lancet looked at the health of London bus drivers and conductors. Researchers found double-decker bus drivers were twice as likely to have heart attacks as their bus conductor colleagues. The drivers sat for 90% of their shift, whereas the conductors climbed the equivalent of 600 stairs.

This led to further studies, all confirming that inactivity and sitting for long periods leads to a significantly higher risk of suffering a heart attack or stroke.



Effect on your weight

An obvious problem that doesn't require much explaining is that being more sedentary means we use less energy and burn fewer calories which of course isn't helpful with weight control.



It's less clear however, why being sedentary affects your metabolism. It has been suggested that digestion is not as efficient when you are sitting, so you retain those fats and sugars as fat in your body. Having a sedentary lifestyle also increases your risk of insulin resistance and diabetes, scientists are still trying to understand why this is.

Effect on muscles and joints

As you already know, sitting requires a lot less muscles than is needed to stand or move around. Our more sedentary lifestyle means that many of us are not using our muscles as much as we used to. For the younger amongst us, maybe nothing noticeable has changed for you, except possibly an awareness of a little more tightness in your muscles whilst exercising or stretching. For those of us who are further along in life, you may be feeling everyday movement such as sitting to standing, reaching, twisting and bending are a little harder now because you are more sedentary. You may be feeling less flexible and your muscles are just not as reactive as they were pre-lockdown.



By Mark Bussetti,
Osteopath - Lloyd's
Wellbeing Centre

Additionally, if you sit hunched over your keyboard and are not paying attention to your posture, this will often lead to further pain and stiffness in your neck and shoulders. Sitting for long periods of time also causes the hip flexor muscles at the front of your hips to shorten and tighten, especially if you have a habit of leaning forward for long periods, peering at your screen.

Inactivity leads to wasting and weakening of the large leg and gluteal (bottom) muscles, so they become less able to counter the forward pulling effect of the shortened hip flexors. This imbalance results in less flexibility around your hip joints, pulling and tilting your pelvis forward, altering the curve in your spine which can result in lower back pain. Having weaker leg and gluteal muscles can also give you less stability when walking and running, which may result in more injuries when you exercise.



Effect on varicose veins & deep vein thrombosis (DVT)

Many of us are aware of the risks of sitting for long periods of time on long flights and the importance of getting up and moving around.



But sitting anywhere for long periods isn't good. Uninterrupted sitting causes the blood to pool in your legs and can lead to varicose veins or smaller spider veins to form in your legs. These are more unsightly than dangerous, although in rare cases, they can lead to blood clots, which can cause serious problems. That's why it's a good idea to break up long sitting sessions, whether it be on a plane or in your home.



Effect on mood, anxiety and depression

Researchers have found that the risk of both anxiety and depression is higher in people that are more sedentary, although they are still trying to find out why.

There are many theories such as the fact that being sat down for long periods compromises our breathing and this lack of oxygen may affect our mood, which over time can make us feel tired, irritable or depressed.

Sitting and cancer

Still a mystery to researchers is the finding that the more you sit, the higher the chance of developing certain types of cancers including lung, uterine, and colon cancers. Studies have shown that older women also have higher odds of breast cancer.

Sitting can shorten your life

Excessive sitting contributes to reduced longevity even if you exercise regularly. It's still not clear to researchers as to why this is, but given the link to several serious diseases such as diabetes and heart disease, it's not surprising.

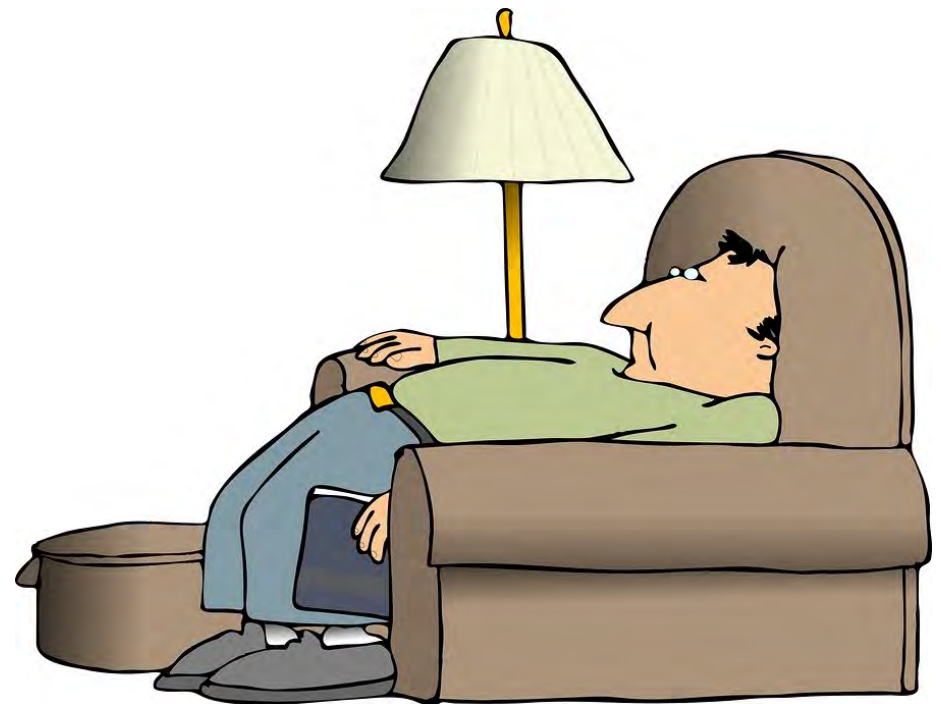
Won't exercising help?

Even if you exercise at high levels this doesn't seem to offset the negative effects of sitting for extended periods. So, when it comes to exercise, any activity is good - some is better than none, and more is better than less. Ideally, work in a full half-hour or hour of exercise each day, but short spurts is fine, if this is all you can manage. If you can only squeeze in 10 minutes of dedicated exercise at a time, this is better than no exercise.

Effect on the brain

A group of researchers from UCLA carried out a study that looked at the thickness of the medial temporal lobes of the brain which are crucial to the creation and storage of memories.

The study found that subjects (aged between 45-75 years) who spent more time seated in their daily activities were found to have thinner medial temporal lobes. This being a precursor to cognitive decline and may increase the risk of Alzheimer's and dementia in middle-aged and onwards.



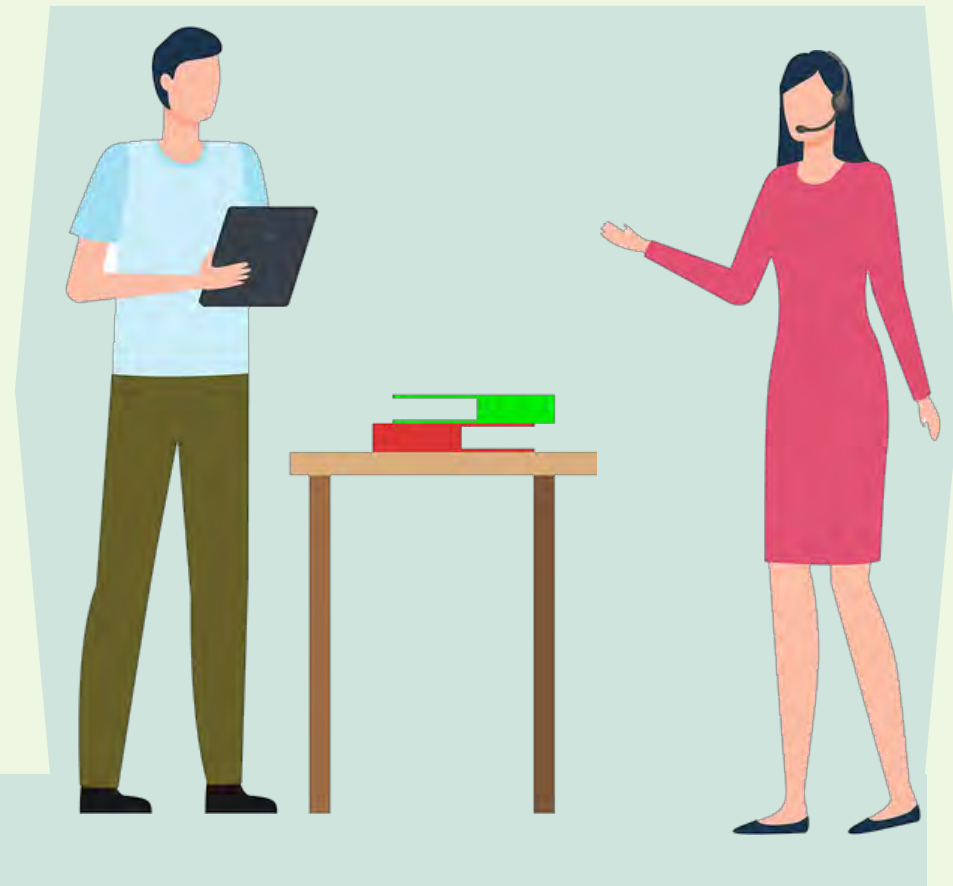
How you can break up your lock-down sitting time?

One of the benefits of working from home is that you can be more flexible with building a movement schedule to reduce the negative effects of uninterrupted sitting. Try and include more movement in to your day to intermittently disrupt the time you spend sitting down.



THE REMEDY: SIT LESS, STAND MORE

1. Stand up, stretch and move every half hour or so to activate your muscles and stop your joints from getting stiff. Try walking or marching on the spot, use the stairs, jump up and down, or try some of the stretches and exercises on the next few pages.
2. Simply breaking up sitting time with 2-5 minutes of light or moderate activity every 30 minutes can help your blood sugar balance and stop your weight increasing.
3. Moving around even for very short periods helps use up calories without boosting appetite or food intake to make up for the extra energy burnt.
4. Ideally stand at your workstation for part of the day. Invest in a standing workstation or one that can adjust to sitting and standing positions or improvise.
5. Stand up while you read emails or reports, or while you talk on the phone.



6. Move your rubbish bin or printer away from your desk so you have to get up to throw anything away or collect your printing.
7. Make a habit of only talking whilst you are standing. Use the speaker phone for conference calls and walk around the room during the call.
8. Get up and move around when you're on Zoom, Facetime, Skype. etc. Keep gently stretching and moving whilst you are talking.
9. Set your timer to go off every 30 to 60 minutes during the day to remind yourself to get up and stretch or take a short stroll before continuing.
10. Let technology help you sit less: Download a sitting-time tracking app that tells you when to get up and move around. Try Stand Up! The Work Break Timer on Apple, or Break Reminder on Android. If you're at a laptop or computer, try WorkRave for Windows, Break Timer Google Chrome extension, or Time Out for Windows or Mac.



You can apply these tips to many activities where you are sitting for a prolonged period—not just your work-life. Think creatively about how you could do the same task or activity standing, such as:

- Household chores ironing or sorting washing
- Rather than sitting down to read, listen to recorded books while you walk, clean, or work in the garden
- Try doing your arts and craft activities standing rather than sitting, such as journaling, painting, drawing, etc.

Stretching is a low impact method of exercise designed to increase flexibility and tone the muscles of the body.

Sitting for long periods of time will tighten your hip flexors. Other muscles that could be affected include spine stabilising muscles, piriformis, pectoralis major (pecs, chest), and muscles around your calf and heel. Mobilising and stretching these areas will help to improve comfort when sitting and alleviate tightness.

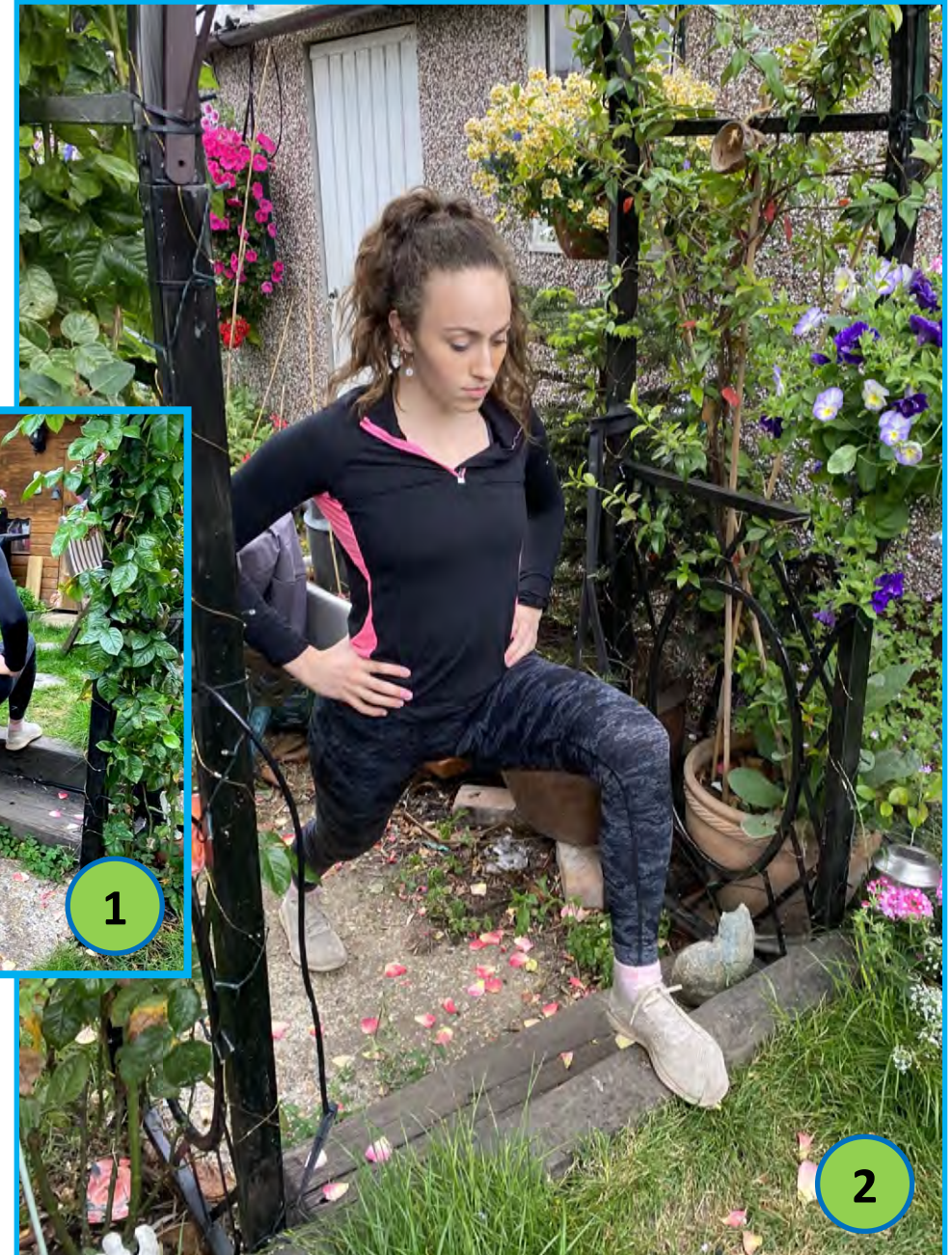
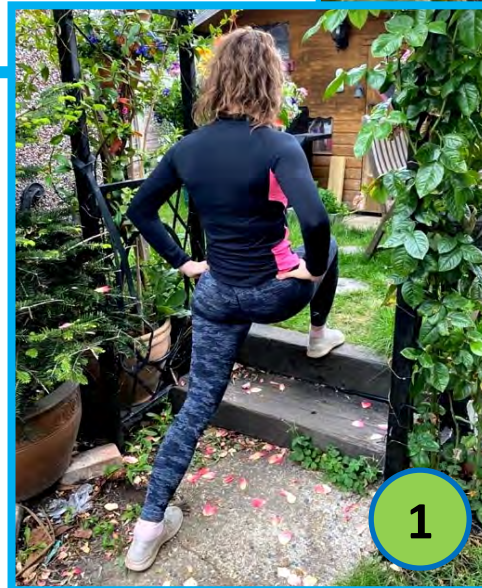
These stretches could be done before, during or after work to keep the body mobile, and break up continuous sitting.

Hip Flexor Stretch:

- Plant one foot onto a step with the other foot behind on the ground (you can do these on any steps, inside or outside).
- Push your hips very gently into the stretch keeping your body upright (use support with your hands if you need it).
- The further you push your hips, the deeper you will feel the stretch.
- Hold for 20-30s and switch legs.
- Repeat this 2-3 times.

Before you try these stretches & exercises—You should be in good health to conduct these simple stretches and exercises. Please take medical advice if you are unsure of your level of fitness or physical ability to undertake these stretches or exercises. We shall not be responsible for any injury arising from the performance of these stretches or exercises.

How to stretch—Stretch slowly and smoothly until you feel the stretch in the desired muscle. Do not force the stretch or bounce. **If you feel any pain you should stop.** Some of you will be more flexible than others. If you need support, improvise with a secure chair or stair banister to hold on to.



Superman Stretch: Hip Flexor + Shoulder Mobility

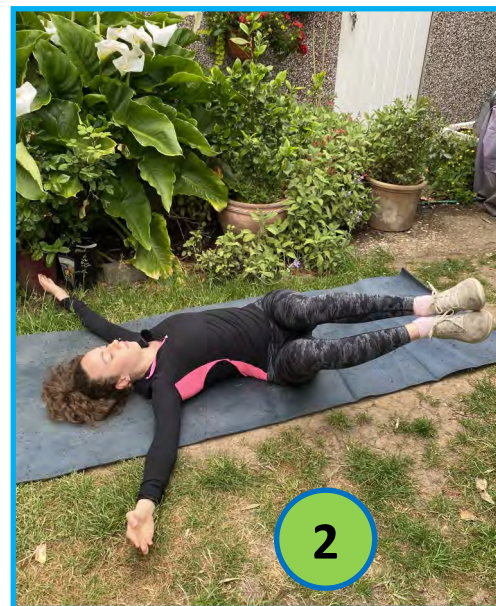
- Place your hands shoulder width apart on the floor and your feet hip width apart in a straight arm plank position (as shown).
- Bring one leg forward to the outside of your hand keeping your back flat and head looking forward.
- Brace yourself with your core.
- Rotate your arm next to the foot up and over, with your head following your hand and hold for 5s.
- Repeat the whole process at least 5 times each side.
- *A gentler version (picture 4):* do not lunge quite so deep, only go as far as you can achieve and build up each day as your muscles begin to loosen. Stop if you feel any pain.





T-Openers: Thoracic Spine Mobility

- Lie on your back, with your arms out to the side in a T position.
- Lift your knees up off the ground into a 90 degree position.
- Rotate your knees to the left, ensuring your shoulders do not leave the ground. Go as far as you can without any shoulder movement.
- Do this slowly and carefully in a controlled manner.
- Hold for 5s each side, repeat 5 times each side.





T-Openers: Mobilising and stretching the thoracic spine

- Lie on your side hand on top of the other.
- Open your chest into a T position.
- Again, ensure your opposite shoulder does not come off the ground.
- Repeat x10 each side, x 3.





Piriformis: Relieves tension deep in buttock area from sitting for long periods

- When seated, cross one leg over the other making a triangle.
- Use your arm to apply gentle pressure to the inside of the knee to feel a stretch. Some of you may find this difficult as this is an area where you may experience inflexibility, so take it easy, it may take lots of practice to get this area loosened up!
- Hold the stretch for 5s as you inhale (breathe in).
- As you exhale (breathe out), increase the pressure gradually placed on the knee. Again take it easy, and listen to your body. Stretch gently and build up overtime.
- Repeat 5 times each side.

Star Reach: shoulders, chest, mid back, ankles, hip extension stretch

- Stand legs slightly wider than hips.
- Reach arms up with palms facing forwards.
- Spread your fingers out.
- Go onto your tiptoes (plantar flexion).
- Hold for 10s repeat 5-8 times.
- Use this opportunity to take some nice deep breaths, filling your lungs right to the base, then breathe out. This will help with tightness round your ribcage.



In-person services at the Lloyd's Wellbeing Centre

The Wellbeing Centre is open for in-person appointments again.

A thorough infection control and screening policy has been implemented to facilitate a return to in-person appointments.

Remote (phone/video based) consultation services

We are continuing to offer physiotherapy and osteopathy consultations with our practitioners by phone or video link.

These can be conducted over the phone, or with video link via Skype or WhatsApp. Remote consultations are priced at £45 for 30 minutes, or if you have a current insurance-funded treatment schedule in operation, then we have been advised by that AXA and WPA will honour payment of treatment by this method.

COVID-19 Policy and Infection Control Procedures

Our comprehensive COVID-19 Policy can be viewed on our website at www.lloyds wellbeingcentre.co.uk/covid19-policy

If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to get in touch with us on 020 7327 5341 or info@lloyds wellbeingcentre.co.uk

