



BEYOND THE (HEART) BEATS: Sedentary Time Affects Circulation in Real Time

Sitting for long periods of time slows muscle activity in the legs, which reduces the critical “pumping” action that helps blood return to the heart. Blood can pool more in the lower body extremities, and vessels may become less flexible in the short term.

Research has found that uninterrupted sitting can severely damage vascular function, and short movement breaks help protect from these micro-damages which can accumulate over time.

Over months and years, a sedentary lifestyle is associated with a higher risk of hypertension. A review focused on sitting and hypertension reported small but measurable increases in blood pressure and increased odds of hypertension with more sedentary time.

This does not mean you need to avoid sitting entirely – who could?! Rather, it means your heart and blood vessels benefit when sitting is interrupted often, with light and intentional movements.

Micro-movements Compound

Micro-movements are short bursts of standing or light activity that break up sitting. Research comparing standing breaks and light walking breaks determined

that interrupting sitting with brief movements improves cardiometabolic markers, and light walking often performs better than simply standing.

Evidence further suggests activity breaks lower blood pressure compared with prolonged sitting, even when the movement is light to moderate, putting the “micro” in micro-movements. The takeaway is simple: consistent, intentional small breaks taken throughout the day can improve circulation, supporting blood pressure control and vascular health.

Heart-friendly Rhythm for the Workday

A helpful target is to brief break every 30 to 60 minutes.



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We've highlighted some resources you may want to look into further. Simply click or tap the icon or its hyperlink to access these select materials!

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The exact timing matters less than building a pattern you can repeat. One to three minutes of movement can be enough to reset circulation without derailing your entire day.

Try stacking a tiny movement to moments that already happen. Standing during phone calls, walking to refill water, or doing a short lap around the office or outside, after sending an email can become automatic. Walking meetings also work well for conversations that do not require screen-time and can feel easier than adding another task to your to-do list.

Micro-movements in Small Spaces

Desk-friendly movements do not require equipment. A simple stand-sit cycle can help, especially if you add a few steps. Stand up, roll shoulders back, and take ten slow, deep breaths. Walk to a window and back. Do gentle calf raises while waiting for a document to load. March in one place for two minutes during a meeting that does not require active participation such as speaking.

At home, “movement snacks” fit naturally into routine moments. Walk

during commercials. Stand while folding laundry. Do a few minutes of light cleaning between tasks. Even pacing while talking with a family member counts as a micro-movement.

Using Simple Cues

Consistency boils down to reminders which feel natural. A timer works well as does “habit stacking.” Tie movement to regular anchors like restroom breaks, refilling coffee, checking messages, or switching tasks. A wearable device can also help by nudging you to stand. Devices can be useful for behavior change, and it helps to select tools that support you without adding stress or distraction.

A realistic goal for week one: is notice how long you sit throughout the course of a day. Week two, stretch at least two times per hour. Small wins compound and build confidence and momentum; and that’s how habits become habitual.

Fitness Support Through Your Benefits

Micro-movements help all day long, and structured activity strengthens the effect. The [BCBSIL Fitness Program](#) through Well OnTarget can support a consistent routine. This month, the \$25 enrollment fee is being waived. Use the provided code FEB26FP when registering to receive the waiver.

 [CLICK OR TAP!](#)

[BCBSIL Resources](#) can help you explore preventive care, heart health tools, fitness support programs, and ways to build movement into your routine in a sustainable way.

 [CLICK OR TAP!](#)



GETTING THE FAMILY INVOLVED:

Family time can include movement and is easier when it feels like a fun activity versus a forced act. A short after-dinner walk supports digestion, stress levels, and circulation.

Weekend errands can include parking a bit farther away and turning the walk into a quick scavenger hunt for kids. Even better, add some tunes! Music makes everything easier. A five-minute dance break in the kitchen can raise the heart rate just enough to qualify as light-to-moderate activity.

Outdoor time helps, too. A trip to a park, a bike ride, or a simple game of catch adds movement and improves mood, which also benefits heart health. Global physical activity guidelines encourage reducing sedentary time and replacing it with any intensity of movement when possible.

If pets are part of your family, involve them in your movement activities! Taking a walk with your dog during breaks is an excellent way to squeeze in extra steps. Don’t underestimate how much movement you can get while playing with your pets: twirling a cat wand, tossing a ball for fetch, or training your dog to learn new skills are all great ways to keep moving.



SOURCE: [American Journal of Physiology](#), [Paddy C Dempsey et al](#), [Aidan J Buffey et al](#), [Mary O Whipple et al](#), [Br J Sports Med](#)

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