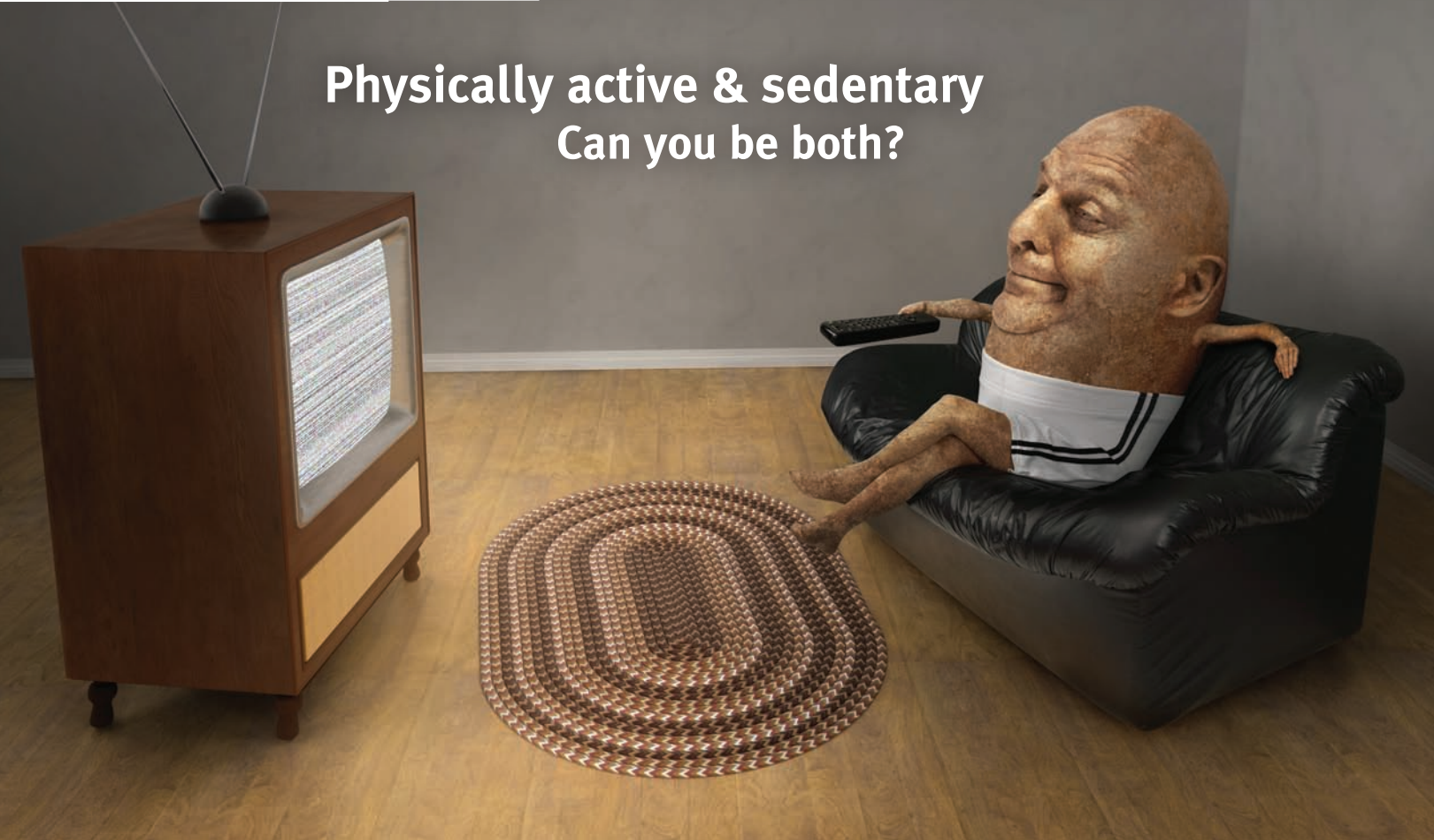




Physically active & sedentary Can you be both?



For most people, the concept of being physically active is something they are pretty familiar with, especially if they've been reading our Winnipeg *in motion* columns.

Canada's new physical activity guidelines, for example, recommend that adults should engage in moderate to vigorous physical activity at least 150 minutes a week. Hit that number and you should be able to consider yourself physically active, right?

Well, yes and no. The truth is that even a person who meets the minimum requirements for physical activity as set out by ParticipACTION and the Canadian Society for Exercise Physiology (CSEP) may not be as healthy as they think they are...or possibly could be. In fact, depending on how they spend the rest of their day, they may also be considered sedentary.

Yes, you read right: it is possible to be physically active and sedentary at the same time.

Confused? Let me explain.

Let's take the example of an adult who

gets out three times a week to go for a 50 minute swim, brisk walk or play a game of tennis or baseball. That person would meet the minimum physical activity guidelines of 150 minutes per week and seem to fit the conventional definition of being physically active.

But let's say that same adult also sits for long periods of time in front of the computer at the office, drives to work, and spends a fair amount of their leisure time reading, watching television or playing video games. As you can see, even though that person may spend some time being physically active, they are also spending a lot of time not moving at all.

And this is where the problem is.

In order to maximize your benefits from being physically active part of your day, you need to ensure that you are not sedentary most of your day.

New research recommends interrupting

sedentary time by taking short breaks, 5 minutes or less, to stand up or walk around, regardless of how much physical activity you do during your regular workouts. In doing so, you will help reduce your risk for cardiovascular and metabolic diseases, some cancers, obesity, and improve bone mineral density and mental health.

Breaking up sedentary time can be done easily with little time or financial commitment. What I'm suggesting (and so does the research) is that you take a look at when and for how long you are sedentary in your day and try to break that up to increase your overall daily energy expenditure.

In other words, if you have an office desk job, as I do, where sedentary time is unavoidable, make an effort to get up every 20 to 30 minutes to walk, stretch, or just stand for less than five minutes to break up your sedentary time. These very brief breaks will increase your productivity and focus at work while improving your health. Seems like a win-win situation to me.

The research on sedentary behaviour

What is sedentary behaviour?

It is the term used to describe behaviours where energy expenditure is low, including:

- Sitting for long periods of time
- Using motorized transportation (bus or car)
- Using a computer at work or home
- Watching television
- Playing passive video games

is so strong that the CSEP has recently released Canada's Sedentary Behaviour Guidelines for Children and Youth – the first of their kind here in Canada. The guidelines suggest children and youth aged five to 17 years of age should minimize the time they spend being sedentary each day. This may be achieved by limiting recreational screen time to no more than two hours per day and by encouraging activity through active play and active transportation.

Although the guidelines are specific to children and youth, I think they're relevant to all ages to start thinking about. We can all benefit from increasing the amount of time we're physically active and decreasing or interrupting our sedentary time. So, think about the time you and your family spend each day being physically active and sedentary, and take steps to increase your activity and interrupt the time you spend sitting. You will be healthier for it.

Deanna Betteridge is a co-ordinator with Winnipeg *in motion*.

FYI

Winnipeg *in motion* is a partnership of the Winnipeg Health Region, the City of Winnipeg and the University of Manitoba. For information on how you and your family can be more active, call 940.3648 or visit: www.winnipeginmotion.ca

A tale of two days

The graphic below shows two sample days with the same amount of physical activity time (green) and sedentary time (grey). The difference is on Day 2, the sedentary time is broken up by short activity breaks.

Day 1

Long stretches of sedentary time

- Wake-up – drive to work (10 minutes)
- Work sitting at my desk (8 hours)
- Go for a walk at lunch (20 minutes)
- Drive home (10 minutes)
- Have supper – swim or workout at the gym or go for a walk (1 hour)
- Watch some TV (1 hour)

Totals:

Physical Activity: 1 hour, 20 minutes

Sedentary: 9 hours & 20 minutes

Day 2

Breaking up sedentary time

- Wake-up – walk the dog (10 minutes)
- Drive to work (10 minutes)
- Work – stand when talking on the phone; take the stairs; refill water bottle often; and limit sitting at desk to 30 minutes at time (8 hours)
- Go for a walk at lunch (15 minutes)
- Drive home (10 minutes)
- Have supper – swim or workout at the gym or go for a walk (45 minutes)
- Watch TV – get up up off the couch during commercials to go downstairs and fold laundry (1 hour)
- Walk the dog (10 minutes)

Totals

Physical Activity: 1 hour & 20 minutes

Sedentary: 9 hours, 20 minutes; but never more than 30 minutes at a time.

