

Linda's T'ai Chi
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What is NEAT?

This article is written by *Elisabeth Almekinder, Health Journalist, Registered Nurse, and Diabetes Educator for the Manos Unidas North Carolina Farmworker Health Program*

I have stolen shamelessly from her work for the Blue Zone newsletter. I found it interesting and helpful. Perhaps you will, too.

“Remaining mobile, walking and moving about is essential to long term health and wellbeing. Premature or over use of a wheel chair when the individual is able to move about can have detrimental effects on overall. This article encourages all of us to keep moving.

What is NEAT?

NEAT is the acronym for Non-Exercise Activity Thermogenesis and occurs with every activity that we perform except sleeping or performing sports- like exercises. It could be yard work, walking, housework, or even fidgeting.

How is NEAT related to exercise and movement throughout the day?

Just getting your thirty minutes to an hour workout doesn't seem to make up for all the time we spend sitting. People with high NEAT “scores” seem to fidget, get up and walk around for no reason, move their arms and legs more and generally get more movement throughout the day than some of their friends who are unhappy with their weight.

1. How does NEAT increase longevity in the blue zones?

Research has shown that if we sit less and move more, we live longer. Balancing what we take in in energy with how much energy we expend can help us control our weight. Certain markers for inflammation have been found to increase when NEAT is not a regular part of your day.

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Small movements throughout the day add up, and the cumulative effect is an increased metabolic rate. Since everything you do besides exercise or sleep improves your “NEAT,” it changes the balance of energy needed and used. Sedentary jobs lead to lower levels of NEAT. NEAT could be the difference between gaining or losing weight, due to the accumulation of energy throughout the day. Since sitting is the new smoking, increasing your NEAT along with a regular exercise program can add years to your life.

Instead of getting the average sedentary time for Americans at a whopping nine to ten hours per day, get up and **move around more often**. Whether you're gardening, taking a lap around the neighborhood, or even standing up during phone calls—**it all counts**. The main thing is that you stay moving more than you sit still for your overall health.

Researchers have seen C - reactive protein related to inflammation, triglycerides, and blood sugar increases in those who don't achieve NEAT on a regular basis.

Heart health for those not achieving NEAT throughout the day is concerning. Also, setting off a loud alarm is how quickly the damage can happen. The journal of the American Diabetes Association published a study outlining how inactivity for just one day can cause cell processes to fail, allowing the breakdown of fats in the blood. This, in turn, lowers good cholesterol or High-Density Lipoprotein (HDL).

Not surprisingly, people in the blue zones achieve higher levels of NEAT through their environments—they walk to their neighbor's homes or to the store, they garden, and they do chores by hand. They don't participate in much structured exercise. They have enough physical tasks to perform daily to keep NEAT at a level deemed as healthy (or even healthier) as regular exercise routines.

How much NEAT is enough?

Though no official public health rules apply here for what's enough NEAT—adding a total of about two and a half hours of standing and light walking around the house or store, or neighborhood should do it. Another tip is to stand up five minutes for every thirty minutes you sit. It shouldn't take much for you to start realizing the benefits without the need for rigid training programs.

What else will boost your NEAT?

Here 10 ways you can try to boost your NEAT score:

1. Get a sit-to-stand desk, which can decrease blood pressure, back pain and blood sugar
2. Take a walk after each meal to lower blood sugars immediately following a meal
3. Don't let family text each other from another room
4. Set your cell phone alarm for a 30-second stretch and five minutes of standing
5. Find friends who want to move with you more and make it a group effort
6. Move around while watching TV
7. Walk around the house while you talk on the phone
8. If you can walk there, do
9. If you can take the stairs, do
10. Practice T'ai Chi every day.