



# Health and Wellness

## Increasing your physical activity levels & the 10 minute in-your-machine workout

By Dr. Delia Roberts



Over the past few years claims have been made that sitting is as deadly as smoking. While this isn't quite true, there is no question that a lack of physical activity substantially increases

the risk of developing diseases like obesity, and all the associated metabolic problems including type II diabetes. Large studies have shown that the more you sit (especially hours spent watching TV or movies), the greater your risk of dying by cardiovascular disease or cancer. There is also an increased risk of knee and back problems, depression, and even autoimmune disease. Unfortunately, this is a very serious issue for most drivers and equipment operators, as when the total time sitting per day exceeds 8 hours, the risk is at its highest level. The good news is that increasing your physical activity levels by even a small amount can help lower this effect.

For those of us that spend our workdays in a machine, truck, or at a desk, finding ways to break up the periods of sitting is critical. Simple tricks include things like standing and stretching for a minute every half hour, walking the long way around when you need

to pick up a file, visit the washroom, or get a cup of coffee – but these kinds of things aren't realistic when you have to find a safe place to stop your truck or interrupt the loading process to take a break. So here are some key areas that need to be addressed, and a few exercises that you can do in your cab anytime as well as a few more to do when you can dismount safely.

### Correct your posture and activate your core first

Before you start exercising it's critical to support your lower back and neck. This is especially true after sitting for a long time, and when exposed to vibrations. Sitting posture and vibrations both act to change the normal signals that your joints send back up to your brain about pressure, tension and load. So a quick realignment is essential for your muscles to be able to support your joints.

Finding neutral posture can seem awkward and complicated at first, but it only takes a few seconds once you've learned how to dial it up and activate your core. It's important to make a habit out of checking your posture regularly. Good ways to do this are to cue it up every time you pass a mile marker or start a new load. It takes a little thought to find the right posture until you get used to it, but soon it will become as easy as calling in your kms. And once your posture is in neutral it will really help reduce neck, back and shoulder pain!

1. Sit tall with a small inward curve to your low back, eyes straight ahead, and your pelvis in neutral. If you keep anything in your pockets, empty them out – especially your wallet in your back pocket. Both butt cheeks/sit bones should be touching your seat evenly, and if you drew a plumb line

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from your ear downwards it should pass through the center of your shoulder and the center of your hip.

2. Once you have your spine and pelvis in neutral, draw your belly in and up ever so slightly without collapsing or tightening your chest. All the tension is in your lower abdomen, your head and spine are still stacked up over one another and your chest is free to expand with a deep breath or move freely if you rotate your body.
3. Add the pelvic floor. This is the sling of muscles that supports your bladder and runs across the bottom of your pelvis. To activate it, sit up tall on a chair and feel the seat where it touches the area between your legs, then draw your pelvic floor up off of the chair. It should feel as though you are tightening your testicles or trying to hold your pee in when you need to urinate but don't have access to a toilet.

## To avoid disease do 10 minutes of physical activity at least three times per day

**In your machine** (stationary and safety brake on)

At least twice a day choose one exercise from each category below for an in-the-cab workout. One workout consists of 10 reps of each of your chosen exercises, then go back to the beginning and repeat the whole thing again. Mix it up so that you don't do the same exercises every day.

### Breathing

- Breathe in as deeply as you can for a count of 3, hold for a count of 3, breathe out for a count of 3
- Breathe in slowly (count of 4) trying to expand your ribs as much as you can. Then reverse it, focusing on squeezing your ribs down as tight as you can (count of 4)
- Breathe in for a count of 2 pushing your belly outwards, breathe out for a count of 2 pulling your belly inwards (ribs shouldn't move much)
- Breathe in for a count of 2, hold for a count of 2 then blow the air out on a count of 1 (it will feel fast but make sure to draw the air all the way in to the bottom of your lungs)

- Breathe in for a count of 2 by expanding your ribs (movement of your chest is only sideways, not up and down). Reverse by pulling your ribs in for a count of 2.

### Head

- Drop your chin all the way to your chest, then keeping your chin down roll your head to the right, let your chin come up as you continue the circle to tilt your head to the back, and then roll your left ear to left shoulder and chin back down to your chest to complete the circle. Shoulder and spine stay put, only your head moves
- Repeat the above but make the circle to the left rather than to the right
- Drop your chin down to your chest on a count of 2, drop your head to the back on a count of 2. Shoulder and spine stay put, only your head moves
- Drop your right ear to right shoulder, then left ear to left shoulder. Shoulder and spine stay put, only your head moves
- Turn your head to the right as far as you can, then back to the left as far as you can. Shoulder and spine stay put, only your head moves
- Turn your head to face the right, drop your chin down and roll your head across the front and up to face the left. Then reverse. Shoulder and spine stay put, only your head moves
- Do the half circle described in the exercise before this one, but use your hand to gently pull your head down so that you get a little stretch. Go slowly and when you find a sore spot, spend at least 30 seconds in that position before moving on.

### Shoulders

- Shrug your shoulders up to your ears and then back down. Keep your postural alignment, only your shoulders move
- Lift your shoulders up to your ears, then roll them as far forward as you can, then press them down and lengthen your neck up, and finally squeeze your shoulder blades together before returning to neutral.
- Reverse the above
- Put your hands against the steering wheel or dashboard and push slightly to contract your arm muscles. Keep the forward pressure on while you roll your shoulders forward and then squeeze your shoulder blades together
- Hold on to the steering wheel, arm rest or handle. Keeping your shoulder down and in neutral posture, pull against the wheel to contract the muscles on the outside of your arm for 10 seconds. Then push against the wheel to contract inwards. Repeat with the other arm

- Keeping your shoulders down, raise your arms up over your head and press your hands against the roof of the cab. Hold for a count of 10, then drop your arms and press down against the seat for a count of 10
- Put a Lacrosse ball into an old sock and place it behind your shoulder. Lean back against your seat as you roll the ball across your upper back. Hold for 30 seconds when you find a sore spot.

### Waist/hips

- After setting your posture rotate at the waist as far to the right as you can go. Tighten your core and pelvic floor and bend forward as far as you can without letting your low back round up. Return to upright and then lift your chest and lean back keeping your head lined up with your spine. Return to center before twisting at the waist the other way and repeating the forward and backward bends. Lastly, while facing front, bend at the waist as far as you can to the right, return to center and then as far as you can to the left. Note: It's likely that space constraints in the cab will prevent you from bending forward or sideways on the left side, but do the best that you can within the space available. If you put your hands behind your head this will be harder
- Sit tall and set your core and pelvic floor. Lift one butt cheek off the seat, then return to center and lift the other. Try not to collapse at the waist but rather keep your ribs lifted and move your hips underneath you. After returning to center, gently round at the low back and then tilt your pelvis forward to arch your low back – again keeping your ribs lifted and your core activated.

### Legs

- Sit tall in your seat with your back off of the seat back. Make sure your lower back is in neutral and your core and pelvic floor are activated. Lift your right leg off of the seat with the knee bent – don't let your hips twist even a little. If they do twist, lower your leg, focus on your core and pelvic floor and try again. Hold for a count of 5 and lower your leg back down, repeat with the left leg
- Same exercise as above but after lifting your leg off of the seat, straighten it as much as you can before holding for the count of 5. Return to the bent position before lowering
- Same exercise as above but rather than holding for a count of 5 in a static position, straighten and bend your leg 5 times before lowering back down
- Same exercise as above but after lifting your leg off of the seat move your knee out to the right (on the right side), or left (on the left side) so that you use the muscles on the inside and outside of the thigh to control the movement Open and close the thigh 5 times before lowering the leg and repeating on the other side
- Alternate right side, left side on a count of two for any of the above exercises instead

of holding the static position. In other words, lift the right knee, put it back down (don't drop it, but lower it deliberately), then immediately switch to the left side, then back to the right and so on until you have lifted each side a total of 10 times

- With your feet squarely on the floor, put your hands on the seat beside your hips, press your upper back into the seat back and lift your butt off of the seat. Your arms are mainly for balance, don't use them to support your weight. Hold for a count of 5-10.

## Feet

- Lift one leg off of the seat and straighten it to about 45 degrees. Point your toe and then flex your foot as much as your boots will allow, 5-10 times. Repeat on the other side
- Repeat the exercise above but instead of point and flexing your foot, make a circle with your toe. In other words, from the flexed position turn your toes inwards as far as you can, then point towards the floor, then to the side and back up to the flexed position. Repeat circling around to the outside first
- Place your feet flat on the floor and lift your heels off, then lower them back down
- As much as you can inside your boots, curl your toes, wiggle them up and down, or stroke the sole of your boot for a count of 5
- Put the toe of your left foot on top of the toe of your right foot, pull up with the right as hard as you can. Adjust the pressure that you put on your left foot so that your right toes can move up and down slowly, while contracting hard. Switch to the left foot on the bottom and right foot on the top
- This exercise is the same idea as the one above, but instead of up down, try to move your foot inward and outward.

## On the ground

- Once a day do an on-the-ground workout. One workout consists of ten reps of each of your chosen exercises, then go back to the beginning and repeat the whole thing again. The walk around is a great time to do this. You have to get out of your truck anyhow, so take an extra 5-10 minutes and move!
- Walk around your machine 5 times. As you do so focus on keeping your posture in neutral and your core and pelvic floor activated the whole time. Bend with squats when you need to inspect lower areas
- Face your machine somewhere that the ground is reasonably even and not icy. Step back about 4 foot lengths away and put your hands on the machine at shoulder height so that you are leaning against the machine with a straight body and straight arms. Bend your arms to lower your body forward in a standing push up, then straighten them again to raise your body. If you have the strength you can do these off of the lower step of your machine, so that your body is almost fully horizontal

- Use some resistance banding, an old bicycle inner tube or a bungee cord that is tied off to a handle on your machine. Standing with your right side closest to the machine, grab the elastic, bend your elbow to 90 degrees and tuck it into your waist. There should be a little bit of pull from the elastic. Resist the pull as you open your arm so that your right hand moves closer to the machine. Then pull as you move your hand across to your waist on the left. Return to the middle and after your 10 reps, switch the elastic to your left hand (your right side is still closest to the machine). With your left elbow bent 90 degrees tucked in close to your side, pull on the elastic to open your left arm to the left, then resist the pull as your left hand moves across to your waist on the right
- Repeat the above exercise with your left side closest to the machine
- Hold onto the handle for 3-point contact. Lift one foot up onto the lower step of your machine. Using your leg (arm is only for balance), push up as though stepping up onto the platform. Fully step onto the upper step before lowering yourself back down. Complete your 10 reps, then switch sides
- On a reasonably smooth surface with good traction step straight forward with a big step, then keeping your weight even between your two legs, lower into a lunge. Your front knee should not drop inwards, keep it lined up with your foot and pointing straight ahead. Extend your legs and push off your front foot to return to standing. Repeat on the other side
- This exercise is similar to the one above, but the step is out to the side instead of to the front. As before control your knees to make sure they are lined up with your feet and do not drop inwards. You can bend both knees or keep the left leg straight when stepping to the right, and the right straight when stepping to the left. Both kinds of side lunges are good, as long as your lower back stays in neutral and your bent knee is lined up with your toes. Repeat on the other side
- Touch your machine for balance and raise yourself up onto your tiptoes, then lower. If you can control this on two feet, try it one leg at a time
- Jumping jacks and skipping are great ways to raise your heart rate when you don't have much space. Start with 30 seconds at a time and increase by 30 seconds every third day until you can do 10 minutes.

## Stick with it and reap the rewards!

- When you first start moving it's going to be hard. It will feel awkward and you'll likely experience some muscle soreness. The people around you might not be supportive. But if you keep it up for a couple of weeks it will feel better! You'll start to see how much easier it is to perform daily tasks, you'll sleep better and have more energy – the benefits are endless. So start today, make

the commitment to yourself and your family, and reap the rewards of improved health ten-fold! 🙌

## Breathing yourself to calm

A presenter at the 2019 HarvestTECHX steep slope logging conference in Richmond, BC shared some excellent tips on managing stress.

Lance Burdett, of WARN International, out of Auckland New Zealand, took participants through breathing exercises and tips to not only calm oneself but to get to sleep quickly.

Do check-out his 6-page tip sheet on step by step activities you can try to help you better control your fight-or-flight-response so that the next time you feel yourself getting angry or afraid you can take back control through how you breathe.

Spoiler alert: Take a long slow deep breath (always through your nose) to fill your lungs and hold it for at least three seconds (count inside your head as you hold your breath) before slowly breathing out. Do it once or twice. Don't do it more than that as you could hyperventilate. Do it now and feel the change.

See [www.warninternational.com](http://www.warninternational.com) to learn more and to download the tip sheets. 🙌

## Managing an aging workforce for health, safety and performance

As industries across the world focus on rethinking workplaces to attract Generation Z and Millennial workers, more attention is also being paid to keeping aging workforce members at work for longer – leveraging their many years of experience, work ethic and reliability.

Here is a recent article on the topic with tips for workplaces to consider in supporting improved health and wellness among an aging workforce and a link to a Q&A on aging workers from the Canadian Centre for Occupational Health and Safety:

<https://www.safetyandhealthmagazine.com/articles/18302-managing-an-aging-workforce> and [https://www.ccohs.ca/oshanswers/psychosocial/aging\\_workers.html](https://www.ccohs.ca/oshanswers/psychosocial/aging_workers.html) 🙌