Don’t Just Sit There
Transitioning to a Standing and Dynamic Workstation for Whole-Body Health

BY KATY BOWMAN · PROPRIOMETRICS PRESS © 2015 · 152 PAGES

“My reason for writing this book is that, right now, you’re probably super motivated to sit less, and I’d like to help you transition appropriately. In order to do that, you need a deeper prescription for sitting less that’s more than simply ‘standing more.’ Therefore, I’ve included the following four sections in this book:

• How to build a perfect workstation
• How to sit better
• How to stand better
• How to work out on company time!

The last section is a two-parter, because not only will I give you exercises to de-chair your body on your movement breaks, but I will also show you how you can exercise your body while you are simultaneously working (you won’t need extra time outside of work to do these exercises)."

~ Katy Bowman from Don’t Just Sit There

As Mark Sisson says in the introduction to this book, Katy Bowman is “the world leader in the burgeoning field of biomechanics and how it relates to optimal human development.” Katy has a popular blog called “Nutritious Movement” and an equally popular podcast called “Katy Says.”

Alexandra loves her and has been encouraging me to read this book for awhile—especially on days when she sees me with horrible posture as I’m reading or typing! (Which, unfortunately, is most days. Hah. Need to work on that. :)

This is a great, quick-reading, smart and funny look at how we can optimally transition from sitting all.day.long to creating a standing and dynamic (← key word!) workstation to help us optimize our whole-body health. (Get a copy of the book here.)

Although short, the book is packed with Big Ideas and I’m excited to share a few of my favorites so let’s jump straight in!

Q: IS SITTING THE NEW SMOKING? (A: NO.)

“As I explain more deeply in my book Move Your DNA: Restore Your Health Through Natural Movement, the sitting itself isn’t really the problem; it is the repetitive use of a single position that makes us literally become ill in a litany of ways. For example, muscles will adapt to repetitive positioning by changing their cellular makeup, which in turn leads to less joint range of motion. This muscle and joint ‘stiffness’ can lead to a stiffening of the arterial walls within these muscles. The positive news is that, because we’ve all been sitting (static) the same way for decades, changing our static positioning (i.e., standing more) can improve our health, as can moving intermittently throughout the day.”
This is a key theme of the book.

We need to see that it’s the constant STATIC nature of our sitting position throughout the day that is causing the bulk of our problems.

The solution isn’t to simply stand more. If we do, we’d be swapping out one STATIC position for another—not solving the root of the problem and potentially creating other challenges.

What we want to do is create a DYNAMIC workstation such that we’re moving more—in TINY ways—throughout the day.

Now, is sitting the new smoking?

Katy says: “Sitting and smoking are different: sitting itself isn’t the creator of ill effects the way smoking a cigarette is. Sitting—the position—is perfectly harmless when ‘consumed’ appropriately. It’s not like putting your butt into a chair makes you ill; as they say, ‘it’s the dose that makes the poison.’”

So, short answer: No, it’s not.

She also says: “Language can also get us into trouble when we’re seeking solutions, because we keep equating sitting with not moving, but in many cases, the physical effects of sitting are just as much created by repetitive geometry (always sitting in the same way) as they are by the metabolic changes that come with being sedentary. So sitting differently can improve your health in the same way that standing can—which is great news for the millions of people who aren’t yet quite fit enough to stand for considerable amounts of time. Yes, even you—who want to change your risk profile for disease but feel trapped by your current physical limitations—can change how you sit and improve your health on a cellular level.”

ARE YOU ACTIVE *AND* SEDENTARY?

“There are evidence-based ways to sit and stand better but the conditions that make these positions better for you are limited in scope. Which is why in addition to making postural adjustments, which introduce new body loads and require different muscles to work, you also need to move more throughout the day—throughout being the key term. The newest research shows that you can be active (as in, faithfully completing your daily workout at the gym while logging “10 miles ran today” on your marathon training program) and still be sedentary (as in, commuting back and forth each day to your desk job and consuming extensive digital entertainment in your leisure hours).

Let’s work to solve the problem by not just getting up and out of our chairs, but by creating intermittent movement—both on the large and small scale—while still getting our business/work done. As you proceed through the next sections about workstations, sitting, standing, and doing clever exercises in the office, always keep the big picture goal in mind that’s these optimal setups are really way stations to flow through over the course of the workday.”

Get this:

You can be active *and* sedentary.

As great (and important) as those intense workouts are, we need to remember to move T.H.R.O.U.G.H.O.U.T. the day.

It’s not enough to bust out a workout in the morning then hop in our cars, sit for our commute, walk to our desk and sit for the next x hours before hopping back in our cars and sitting down for dinner and TV.

We’ve gotta pack our days with DYNAMIC movement.

Let’s look at some ways to go about doing that.
But first: Are you looking for the perfect chair?

Here’s what Katy has to say about that: “I’m often asked for my recommendation for the best office chair, to which I have no good reply. What makes it good is the frequency with which you choose not to use it. Most of the problems with sitting all relate to the perpetual stillness, not the position itself. That being said, many times people are looking for a chair that makes their _______ (fill in the blank) feel better. I suggest you put your search efforts and spending dollars towards improving your musculoskeletal health through corrective exercise and alignment, not towards a device that makes your tissue weaknesses less uncomfortable. Discomfort is nature’s way of letting you know that something is wrong and again, it’s not necessarily the way you’ve been sitting that’s hurting you (although yes, the way you sit can certainly give rise to problems) but the heaps and heaps of time you have spent sitting.”

Hah. What makes a chair great is how little you sit in it. Love it.

Check out the book for more details, but know that Katy recommends a flat, kitchen table type of chair rather than a bucket seat to help with optimal alignment.

Plus: Katy has certified teachers to help you learn how to move properly. Find them here. (I’m excited to start my training soon. :)

**MICRO MOVEMENTS + OPPORTUNITIES TO MOVE**

“Most of us understand ‘movement’ to mean a large physical feat or sweaty bouts of exercise. While large movements and sensible workout routines are great, the smaller, more subtle movements that you engage in without a second thought throughout the day are just as important to your health. Smaller movements—like the rotation of your ribs, the work down the outer thigh as you stand on one foot, and the ongoing, isometric contraction of the calf muscles as they hold your body upright—all serve a purpose when it comes to maintaining healthy biological function.”

That’s from a section in which Katy gives us a bunch of little movements we can do while actually working—calf stretches, weight shifting, foot stretches and some eye ball training we’ll get to in a moment.

The primary point here is that we don’t need to go nuts at the gym to boost our movement quotient.

Tiny little micro movements are HUGE in creating a more dynamic work environment. Our bodies and cells eat it up.

Michelle Segar—one of the world’s leading researchers focused on the science of how to create motivation to engage in healthy behaviors—talks about a similar idea in her great book No Sweat. She tells us we need to look for “opportunities to move” throughout our day.

Here’s how she puts it: “Finding opportunities to move (my clients abbreviate this as OTMs, so I will too) throughout the day is surprisingly fun. You’ll be amazed at how soon you begin to become aware of the free spaces in the day that present themselves and the surprising places that are conducive to movement. You may think that your day is crammed so full that you can’t fit in one more thing, but believe me: It’s not true. If you’ve got one minute, you’ve got time.”

<— OTMs. They’re small but big.

Katy describes something similar: “Also, you’ll want to build small actual walks across the earth during your work day—walk for three minutes every half hour of your eight-hour work day, and you’ll have been moving for an extra forty-eight minutes every day. (I cannot even tell you how much these three-minute ‘health’ breaks add up. They really do!) Spend your lunch hour and breaks in motion and you’ll be doing even better.”
How about a quick inventory of the range of possible movements?
Let’s call our possibilities: micro + mini + macro.

- **Micro movements** include something as simple as stretching your calf while at a standing desk or changing your sitting position (I just pulled a foot up on my chair while I sit and type this—go me!). The key here is to shift from STATIC to DYNAMIC.

- **Mini-movements** include Segar’s OTMs—those little opportunities to do a little bit more movement through our day. They add up in significant ways. Katy also shares a bunch of mini-movements we can do while taking little breaks from work at work—things like nerve stretches where you extend your arms out with your palms out and your fingers pointing up. (Feel that? Ahhh...) We want to find opportunities for mini-movements throughout the day—scoring more points for DYNAMIC awesomeness.

- **Macro-movements** include our typical get-your-sweat-on exercise sessions. These are important (of course!!) but remember that, unless we embrace the micro- + mini-movements, we can be active yet still sedentary.

How can YOU optimize each of your movement categories a little more today?

**Micro-movements:** ______________________________________________
________________________________________________________________

**Mini-movements:** ______________________________________________
________________________________________________________________

**Macro-movements:** ______________________________________________
________________________________________________________________

Get on that!

**TRAIN YOUR EYEBALLS**

“To really give your eyes a break and keep their muscles supple, you must take your eyes away from your computer and look at the farthest point away from you. Ideally you should be able to look out a window, where the farthest object is hundreds of feet away—the cross training equivalent of running if you are typically a swimmer. If there is no window, then look across the room, hopefully in a different office, which gets you about 30 feet worth of eye relation—more like cross training with the leg press machine when you’re used to cycling every day. Take ‘look beyond your computer’ breaks during your work day, at least a quick glance every five minutes, and more extended gazes every 30 minutes.”

Your eyeballs have muscles.

We need to flex them if we want them to stay healthy.

If all we do all day long is stare at a screen (or book or whatever) 20 inches away from our face, we’re strengthening that group of muscles and weakening the longer-range focus muscles.

So, we’ve gotta cross train the old eyeballs by remembering to look up and out at distant sites.

Our new eye training routine: Let’s look beyond our computers with at least a quick glance every five minutes and more extended gazes every 30 minutes.

I just took a quick peek at the mountains that are a few miles away outside my office window. (And will be doing so much more often and deliberately from now on.)

You? How’re you going to train your eyeballs?
**NIGHT-LIGHTING**

“Light bulbs have been with us since the 1800s and used heavily for fewer than 100 years, making ‘night-lighting’ less than a seconds-old habit to our physiology, comparatively speaking. We, like all animals, are absolutely unaccustomed to digital-light stimulation after dark. If you’re experiencing issues related to melatonin, I strongly suggest you evaluate your relationship with the light input experienced by your own personal ecosystem.”

This is from a section in which Katie shares a story of research she did on baby sea turtles in Cancun. Apparently, right after being born, these little guys are (supposed to be) guided by the light of the moon into the sea. Since the bright lights from the hotels on the beach showed up, many have been unable to “seafind” their way to their home in the ocean—with many dying on the beach or in the hotel’s pools.

The point is clear: ALL ANIMALS suffer when we allow artificial lighting into our lives at night. PERIOD.

We talk about this a lot in *Optimal Sleep 101*.

For now, remember this wisdom from Shawn Stevenson’s *Sleep Smarter* where he tells us that eliminating screen time at night is THE (!) #1 way to optimize your sleep: “This is likely the number one thing you can do to improve your sleep quality immediately. The artificial blue light emitted by electronic screens triggers your body to produce more daytime hormones (like cortisol) and disorient your body’s natural preparation for sleep. Computers, iPads, televisions, smartphones, etc. are kicking out a sleep-sucking blue spectrum of light that can give you major sleep problems.”

Be nice to your melatonin. Turn off the bright lights.

**WANT GREAT IDEAS? MOVE.**

“One study measured participants’ creativity in four separate experiments in different settings: sitting, sitting outside, walking on a treadmill, and walking outside. Creative thinking was boosted during and immediately after walking, and with walking outside producing the most novel and highest quality analogies.”

Want to be creative? Get outside and go for a walk.

Katy talks about how she walks during all her business phone calls—from interviews to contract negotiations. Back in the non-hermit days when I had more meetings/phone calls, I LOVED walking meetings.

Remember: Nature + movement = powerful.

We’ve talked about this in a bunch of Notes. In *Brain Power*, Michael Gelb tells us about research at the University of Michigan in which creativity was boosted by simply walking through the arboretum rather than downtown.

In *Creativity on Demand*, Gelb tells us: “Contemporary science is beginning to validate the intuitive understanding of these great minds. In a study conducted ... a group of fifty-six people who spent four to six days on an Outward Bound nature experience, disconnected from all electronics, showed a 50 percent increase on creativity tests. A follow-up study found that spending just three hours in nature led to a 20 percent improvement. As naturalist John Muir reminds us, ‘Climb the mountains and get their good tidings; nature’s peace will flow into you as sunshine flows into trees. The winds will blow their own freshness into you, and the storms their energy, while cares drop off like autumn leaves.’”

Note to self: Let’s get outside and move. :)

* Exercise in nature is exercise squared.
  ~ John Ratey

* Many super-motivated folks jump right into a new stand-up-all-day desk without considering the best plan to vary the workplace environment and minimize tissue damage.
  ~ Katy Bowman
QUESTIONS AND SOLUTIONS

“The challenge to presenting material based on an evolutionary model’s explanation of optimal health is to try and get these ancient principles to work in a modern setting. Yes, we need to work for a living, but who says that 10-50% of work can’t be done from a home office, where we are free to stand barefoot on a cobblestone mat, do a sprint every 45 minutes in our driveway, or free ourselves from long commutes, tight belts, ‘business’ shoes, and the stress and huge potential for distraction in the modern office? Who says the meetings have to be conducted in a boardroom and not while taking a group walk? Isn’t oxygen crucial to problem-solving? ...

My point is, there are solutions, but in order to find them we have to make sure we are asking the right questions. A good question to start with is: Is your life’s work working for you?

It is my hope that the answer, especially after reading and implementing the ideas in this book, is a resounding YES.”

Those are the last words of the book.

We need to (get to? :) work for a living. Can’t go back to being wild. And... There are a TON of little things we can do to optimize our approach to our work and lives.

So... What little things can you do to dial in a little more today?

Here’s to making our days more filled with dynamic movement as we take baby steps to optimizing and see those benefits aggregate and compound!

Brian Johnson,
Chief Philosopher

P.S. Katy has a bunch of recommended products in the book. Here’s the standing desk I use and I love these shoes. (In Movement 101 we’ll have a full gear guide!)

About the Author of “Don’t Just Sit There”

KATY BOWMAN

Katy is taking the health-and-wellness world by storm with her bold exercise is not movement platform. A biomechanist by training and a problem-solver at heart, she has helped thousands reduce chronic pain, increase bone density, and improve metabolic health through movement and proper alignment, she is a regular source for national health publications like Prevention and Men’s Health, and is a sought after guest on radio, television pod-casted talk shows and news segments. Creator of the Aligned and Well™ DVD series, Katy’s groundbreaking work in pelvic floor restoration has made her particularly popular with midwives, OB/GYNs, and others concerned with pelvic mobility, strength, and health. Connect: nutritiousmovement.com.

About the Author of This Note

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Brian Johnson loves helping people optimize their lives as he studies, embodies and teaches the fundamentals of optimal living—integrating ancient wisdom + modern science + common sense + virtue + mastery + fun. Learn more and optimize your life at brianjohnson.me.