

NEAT EXERCISE FOR THE BRAIN

By **IDEA Authors**

Have you heard that prolonged sitting can be as bad for health as smoking (Owen, Bauman & Brown 2008)? The good news is that movement can help, and it doesn't have to be a marathon. One avenue worth exploring is **non-exercise activity thermogenesis (NEAT)**. NEAT encompasses the calories burned while living life: walking to work, fidgeting, typing, folding clothes, washing dishes, running errands and so on; only sleeping, eating and sports are not included (Levine & Yeager 2009).

Short, simple NEAT activities increase metabolism while enhancing brain health through physical movement, mental stimulation, stress management and socialization. Try these NEAT activities from Terry Eckmann, PhD, a professor at Minot State University in North Dakota who has more than 30 years' experience in the fitness industry.

On-the-Spot Brain Boosters

Try the following moves while standing at your desk or waiting in line.

- Flex from side to side while standing, arms overhead to increase range of motion.
- Stretch the chest by clasping your hands behind your back and looking up. Inhale while stretching, and exhale on the release. Repeat several times.
- Perform squats and lunges.
- March while standing, feet close to the ground or with high knees.
- March while seated.
- Do standing hamstring curls.
- Shift your weight from side to side by swaying the hips.
- Stand in tree pose while brushing your teeth.

Seated Brain Boosters

These moves increase blood flow to the brain and engage the muscles to burn a few extra calories.

- Wiggle or tap the toes and fingers while watching television or sitting at a desk.
- Stand up and sit down at least every 10–20 minutes (every 5–10 minutes if possible); this boosts metabolism and strengthens the glutes and quads.
- Stand up and roll the shoulders up and back, one at a time and together.
- After keyboarding for 5–10 minutes, stop and make circles with both wrists. Open and close the fingers, making a “starfish.” Repeat.
- If you've been sitting awhile and you're feeling sleepy or your back is tight, stand up and reach your hands to the opposite elbows behind your back. Look right and left.
- While sitting in a meeting with your legs beneath your desk, subtly lift one leg at a time. Do this several times; then, as you lift, point your toes to the ground and, as you lower, point the toes up.
- Fidget! The thing that drove your teachers nuts is one of the things that started research on the benefits of NEAT.
- Give yourself a hand or foot massage.

Social Brain Boosters

The following action steps increase social interaction, which supports brain health.

- Challenge a friend or co-worker to a 1-minute office plank or desk push ups every day for a week.
- Pace or walk while you're on a long phone call.
- Schedule daily walks.
- March in place while sending a text.

Find even more information and movement ideas [here](#).