

## Move More, Sit Less for Better Health

SANDY HAGGARD – NUTRITION, FOOD SAFETY, AND HEALTH AGENT

Staying physically active can help people feel more focused, happier, and more productive while reducing stress and fatigue. In contrast, sitting for long periods—especially at a desk throughout the day—can contribute to obesity and high blood pressure. A sedentary lifestyle is also associated with a higher risk of heart disease and some cancers.

Research from the Up4Health Project highlights the value of frequent movement. In one study, participants who took a brief break from sitting every 30 minutes reported better energy levels and less fatigue and showed improvements in movement. They also experienced decreases in cholesterol, triglycerides, and blood glucose compared to those who took one 15-minute break every few hours.

During the eight weeks of K-State Extension's Walk Kansas program, participants were encouraged to engage in at least 150 minutes of moderate physical activity each week and to complete strength training at least twice weekly. In the Southwind District, 114 participants logged their minutes or steps online, tracking progress along virtual trails and building accountability for regular movement.

During a recent Walk Kansas webinar, Dr. Emily Mailey and Dr. Gina Besenyi, associate professors in the School of Health Sciences at Kansas State University, shared research-backed strategies for moving more and sitting less. A reference website is: <https://soundlivingksu.libsyn.com/health-benefits-of-being-in-nature>

Spending time outdoors is another effective way to improve mood and support heart health, including lowering blood pressure and cholesterol levels. The four counties in the Southwind District offer a variety of state and community trails that provide opportunities to walk, hike, or bike close to home. In Iola, the Southwind Rail Trail runs from Humboldt to Iola and connects with the Prairie Spirit Trail behind the Extension Office along State Street, continuing toward Garnett. Lehigh Portland State Park, also in Iola, offers additional trail options. In Toronto, Cross Timbers State Park at Toronto Lake features scenic trails through oak woodlands for hiking, mountain biking, and backpacking.

Gunn Park in Fort Scott, the state's largest municipal park, spans 155 acres and offers numerous outdoor activities. Chanute residents can enjoy walking around Santa Fe Lake or a community trail that runs from the East Main underpass to North Evergreen Avenue and loops around a pond. Many other communities throughout the district offer similar opportunities for families to be active together.

Regardless of how physical activity is achieved, staying active throughout the day is key. Regular movement can help reduce anxiety, increase energy, and improve overall well-being. Participating in group exercise programs adds the benefit of social support and connection, which can further motivate healthy habits.

Small changes throughout the day can also improve blood flow to the muscles and brain. Consider parking farther from entrances, using restrooms located farther away, standing or walking while on the phone, or taking the stairs when possible. Setting reminders through apps can prompt regular

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movement breaks. Simple habits—such as standing to stretch after sending an email, marching in place at the end of a virtual meeting, or doing a few jumping jacks during an afternoon slump—can help reenergize the body and mind.

Planning activity breaks ahead of time and choosing activities you enjoy makes movement more sustainable. Keeping walking shoes or hand weights at the office can remove barriers to being active. Whenever possible, step outside for fresh air and sunlight. Setting specific goals, anticipating challenges, and seeking support—such as joining a walking or exercise group—can also improve success.

The Southwind District offers programs such as Stay Strong, Stay Healthy and Walk With Ease to support active lifestyles. Watch the Southwind website or Facebook page for upcoming schedules and opportunities to get involved.

For information on ServSafe Food Handler Certification, or nutrition programming such as Gut Health, Cooking for 1-2, Dining with Diabetes or Planning Family Meals, please contact Sandy Haggard, Nutrition, Food Safety, and Health Agent, Southwind District, SJHaggard@ksu.edu or 620.365.2242.

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