

TAKING CARE OF A WRITERS' HEALTH

OR MOVE YOUR BUTT

BY JEAN ADAMS

A wise man once said that if you don't make time for your health, you'll be making time for illness.

This came true for me a few months ago when a doctor told me I'd had a stroke. Only a minor one, I was lucky. But it was warning sign and his words were enough to scare the daylights out of me.

I panicked and imagined the worst.

I was doomed.

I imagined all the wonderful books that would never be written. All the Romance Writers of New Zealand meetings I would never be able to attend unless someone took me. Not only writers' meetings but also other groups I belong to.

Never again would I be able to have lunch in the sun at the marina. Or sit and watch the sun sparkling on the sea, sipping lattes and discussing wealth creation.

I wasn't allowed to drive for a month. Being housebound was hell on earth. Halfway through that awful month, I received a phone call from Auckland airport asking whether I was still interested in the job I had applied for eighteen months earlier. I said yes, but I had visions of my wonderful new life going down the toilet.

But wait a minute. What was going on here?

I had almost succumbed to something I'd always sworn I never would. Negativity.

Okay. Take a deep breath and calm down. I told myself I could get **myself** out of this.

The weight had to be the first thing to go while my exercise regimen had to increase. Sitting in front of a computer day in and day out, leading a sedentary life, I had packed on a fair amount of blubber.

The very next day I started a sensible living plan.

I put myself on something some people call the French woman diet, cutting portions in half, and like the French, I started walking a lot more. Let's face it, when you're sitting all day, you don't need a lot of food.

Healthy balance is exactly what I'd like **you** to think about. Seriously. All you need do is eat less and move more.

I've compiled a few tips I found to help me stay healthy.

Every fifteen minutes, yes every fifteen, get up from your computer and move.

I can hear the groans from here. "She's joking. I could be in the middle of the great love scene."

Maybe so, but it's more important that you get off your butt and walk around the room, or the house, and stretch. I know it's tempting when you're in the middle of that raunchy scene, or that car chase, to stay and finish it.

Big mistake.

Why? Because you never get up. There's always something

else to do.

If you make a few notes, there's nothing to stop you walking away for a few moments.

A small timer on your desk will buzz you at 15 or 20-minute writing bites very nicely. And don't forget to reset it each time you sit down.

When you **are** sitting, don't sit still. Fidgeting is a good way to keep moving, even if it's only tapping your foot. Constant movement while sitting burns calories as well.

But while exercising at your computer is helpful it is no substitute for a regular exercise program.

Keep a good posture. Make sure your chair is designed for long days at your desk. Your back should be straight and your head should be looking directly into your monitor. If you have to look down or up, you need to adjust the height of either the screen or your chair. If you have to keep leaning forward to see the screen, you may need to get your eyesight checked.

Help prevent carpal tunnel syndrome. Be sure your wrists are slightly lower than your elbows. Roll your wrists regularly. This will help prevent carpal tunnel syndrome if you spend a lot of time typing.

Keep your legs bent at the knees so the knees are only slightly higher than your hips. Feet should be flat on the floor or on some sort of footrest.

Walk around for few steps and stretch your calves. This will help prevent blood clots from developing. Blood clots,

otherwise known as the aircraft disease, deep vein thrombosis, are fairly common among middle-aged computer users who sit for long hours at a keyboard.

While sitting, keep lifting your legs on the balls of your feet. Repeat this until your legs are comfortably tired. Do it again about 10 minutes later. This will give your legs a good workout and help prevent blood clots.

Get some fresh air into your lungs every so often. Go out into the garden, or stand at the door or window, and take in three long, slow deep breaths. This will revitalise and re-energise you. When you sit down to write again your brain will be fresher and you will have taken a break from negative frequencies said to be emitted by computers.

Stretch your neck and back muscles while sitting. Roll those shoulders backward and forward but never roll your head around because this could damage your neck.

If you're on a cell phone call, get up and do stretches, or leg lifts, anything to keep moving during down time away from the desk.

Don't neglect the health of your eyes. Give them a break from focusing on your computer screen. It's bad for your eyesight to focus on the monitor for long periods of time, so take breaks to look out of the window and focus on something a further distance away.

Optometrists recommend that computer users follow the "20-20-20" rule. For every 20 minutes spent focusing on your

computer screen, spend 20 seconds focusing on something else 20 feet away.

People tend to hunch in front of the keyboard. To counter hunching, open your arms wide, as if you are going to hug someone, and rotate your wrists externally (thumbs going up and back) and pull your shoulders back. You will feel a stretch in the shoulder blade area.

Contract your abdominal and gluteal (butt) muscles, hold them there for a few seconds, then release. You can do this all day long while you are in your chair.

Stretch your arms, legs, neck and torso while sitting. This will help prevent you from feeling stiff.

Try exercises that combine opposing muscle groups to get a good workout. Clasp your hands together with palms facing. Pull up with one hand while pushing down with the other. Good for the arms.

Take advantage of the downtime created by rebooting or large file downloads to get up and try something more ambitious--a few push-ups or jumping jacks. If you're at work get your co-workers to join in. You'll be helping them to take care of their health too.

Buy a hand squeezer. When you have to read something either on the screen or on paper, do some squeezing. It's an excellent forearm workout.

Stay hydrated. Always, always have drinking water nearby, preferably alkalised. You can accomplish this by squeezing in

the juice of a quarter or half a lemon.

Take the time to look after your body and your body will take care of you until you are at least 150 years old. After that, well I don't suppose it'll matter that much.

If you don't want your body to make you stop and take notice of the messages it's sending, pause and listen to it.

But until then, I want you to take care of YOU.

Your body will thank you for it.