

## Travel secrets: When you are sitting too much

By: *Sandra J. Hartley*

Soon, snow birds of all descriptions will follow Mother Nature home to spring in Canada. The trek for Canadian geese is long, strenuous, and harrowing compared to human transport — we just sit during our trip!

Health Canada reminds us that sitting for long periods of time is hazardous to our health. If you beat winter by heading to the Caribbean, Mexico, Cuba, or the southern U.S., you may find a few ideas here to keep “active” on those cramped flights or long car trips home. There are lots of exercises you can do that will not disturb your travel companions.



### *At pit stops and on the plane:*

Stand up and move around at every opportunity. Treat every airport and gas station as a walking and stretching event. These few minutes make for a more relaxing trip.

Bathroom busy? Great! Stretch on the spot. Stretch your calves, do knee lifts and arm circles. Arch your back. Gently bend to each side. Roll your head to stretch your neck muscles. Do ‘standing push-ups’ in the galley against a wall. You can also do lunges in the aisle or galley and make small pelvic circles.

### *While you are buckled in:*

You can do all sorts of isometric exercises. Isometric exercise means pressing different parts of your body together or against an object that will resist the pressure, to build muscle. You can work contractions hard but breath normally to maintain normal blood pressure.

**Legs and feet:** Press sideward one leg against the other. Roll your ankles in circles. Press one foot down against the other using the other foot as resistance. Press your toes down against the chair base ahead. Pull your toes upward. Open your legs and press your legs

sideways against the seat supports ahead. Lift your legs and cross them over and under each other, squeezing each position for up to a minute or to fatigue.

**Arms:** With your arms extended, press your palms together, wrist to wrist and hold. Switch to pressing the backs of your hands together. Do a right biceps curl with your left arm resisting; then switch to a left biceps curl with the right arm resisting. Pull both of your arms up from gripping under your legs. Push down on your arm rests to exercise your triceps. Reach one arm up straight overhead and bend at the elbow to stretch the triceps. Repeat on the other arm.

**Core muscles in your abdomen:** Lift one or both knees. You can ‘march’ your legs up and down, hold them up for a while, or slowly lift and lower both together. Press your knees together hard for 10 to 15 seconds. Pull in your stomach and hold, while breathing normally. Hold arm rests and resist a twist to each side for 10 to 15 seconds. Arch your back and tilt your pelvis forward and then backward.

**Stretching while seated:** Hunch your shoulders up and relax them down. Roll your shoulders. Shoulder stretch on your forward cushion by placing your hands on the top of the seat ahead and relaxing downward

through straight arms. Loosen your seat belt and relax by flexing forward at the hip. Move your feet from side to side like windshield wipers. To stretch your calves, pull both toes upward toward your shins.

**Stretching while standing:** Calf stretches, lunges, and virtually all leg stretches can be done discretely in the aisle of a bus or plane. Rising up and down on your toes, or prancing on the spot is excellent for bringing circulation to the lower leg and ankles.

If you are with family or friends, you can explain what you are doing and invite them to join you. If you are seated beside someone you do not know, just tell them that you will be discretely doing some stretches in your seat for a few minutes. Or third, just wait until your seat partners are sleeping -- they will never know the difference, but you will!

### ***About the Author***

Sandra J. Hartley is a Professor Emeritus in Kinesiology, University of Alberta with a research specialization in Aging and Health Promotion. She retired in 2006 and currently lives in White Rock, B.C.