

SHUT THE SNORE

IF THE PROMISE of better brain function isn't enough to get you out of your chair occasionally, here's another prod: New research suggests it might combat a common sleep disorder.

Thomas Bradley and his team at the Toronto Rehabilitation Institute's Sleep Research Laboratory say they've found a link between sedentary lifestyles and obstructive sleep apnea (OSA), which disrupts sleep and has been linked to increased risk of heart failure, hypertension and stroke.

OSA makes a sleeping person's throat collapse, which stops breathing and startles the sleeper awake, potentially many times each night.

Bradley posits that sitting all day causes fluid to settle in your legs. When you lie down at night, it shifts toward the neck, which expands, constricting the throat. Voila: obstructive sleep apnea.

"It's like taking a half-empty Coke bottle and laying it on its side," he says. "The neck fills up."

The treatment: Shake the contents.

"Office workers ought to get up — I'd say once an hour — and take a 100-yard walk," says Bradley, who's now doing more research to see how much activity is optimal.

And the doctor is taking his own medicine.

"Every hour, I get up from my computer and walk down the hallway and back," he says. "I'm convinced of this. The data are so striking."

— Seanan Forbes