

Being a freelancer
may be hazardous to
your health



Having been a freelancer for nearly nine years, and being limited in terms of the activity I can do because of my cerebral palsy, I definitely know how hazardous being a freelancer can be to my health. In fact, everything on this list, I'm either dealing with or have dealt with recently. If you're a freelancer who is worried about your health, here's my plan of action. Feel free to steal it.

1. Living a sedentary lifestyle.

Not just an issue for freelancers, but for anyone with a desk job, science has made no secret of how . It not only increases the risk of high blood pressure, but also heart disease, anxiety, depression and certain types of cancer. Plus, activity tends to decrease with age anyway, so it's important to stay as active as you can, for as long as you can.

- Exercise at your desk. Think there's not much you can do at your desk? You're wrong. I recently invested in an under-the-desk pedaling machine that allows me to "ride a bike" while I work. It's not exactly getting my heart rate up, but I'm moving. As a bonus, I can use it with my hands at the end of the day to stretch them out. This helps with my carpal tunnel -- which I owe to all the typing I do every day.
- Change your desk. aren't a new concept, but their popularity is increasing. Why? Beyond keeping you from sitting all the time, they also offer more benefits, like increasing productivity since your body is already at the beginning stages of motion and in less pain. There are several models available, so you can choose the one that works best for your office environment. I'm not sure I can actually make this work

for me, since I can't stand for prolonged periods of time, but I'm considering investing in a sit/stand desk so I can at least try.

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2. Repetitive stress injuries.

happen when you put too much stress on a joint because of repetitive motion.

- Take breaks. To combat the sedentary lifestyle, and give your mouse clicking side a rest, get up and take a . I do this -- and during this time, I do quick cleaning tasks like loading my dishwasher, throwing a load of laundry in the washing machine or cleaning the litter box. It rests my eyes, helps me feel like I'm staying on top of the housework that taunts me all day and keeps me from waking up with an achy shoulder -- all while helping to undo some of the side effects of prolonged sitting.
- Use correct posture. It may be uncomfortable at first because you're so used to slouching all the time, but the correct posture can help minimize stress on your body, decreasing the risk for repetitive motion injury. If you struggle with it, to help you.
- Build an ergonomic workstation. helps with posture and makes sure you're working with your body in the optimal position since you have to sit to get your work done. This involves making sure you have a good supportive chair, and your desk height, monitor distance and other factors are adjusted the correct way.

3. High stress.

Freelancers live in a number of stressful situations -- balancing work with the demands of life, dealing with cash flow issues, deadlines and more.

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- Keep a constant eye on your workload. When you have too much work, it's easy to stress. When you don't have enough, it adds to the stress because you have to figure out how to pay the bills. Plus, there's that whole work-life balance thing. Keep an eye on what you've got on your plate, and adjust according to other factors in your life.
- Schedule some flexibility into your deadlines when possible. The pressure of having to get something done *right now* can stress you out, especially if you get interrupted by phone calls, emails, kids, pets, friends or neighbors. Only take tight deadlines when you know you can get the work done. Otherwise, try to give yourself a few days to a week to complete everything on your plate.
- Learn relaxation techniques. From meditation to deep breathing, or even finishing your day with a hot shower or bubble bath, take time to , not just when your stress levels are high.

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4. Depression.

Isolation is a common issue for freelancers since many of us work from home. Social media and instant messaging help, but sometimes there's just no replacement for face-to-face interaction with local friends.

- Try joining a co-working space in your area. It'll get you out of the house at least one day a month and gives you a chance to socialize with other people who are in a situation similar to yours.

- Make a lunch date with a friend once a week. Even if it's just to grab a quick cup of coffee before going back to work, being social will help stop feelings of isolation.

5. Poor diet.

For many freelancers, the kitchen is just a few steps away from the desk.

That opens up the door for a lot of snacking and other bad habits. For me, it's the opposite.

- Set alarms to remind yourself to eat. There have been many times I've skipped breakfast and gone straight to work, gotten up to make lunch, and forgotten it in the microwave. I know this can't be healthy, so I've started eating something every morning before I sit down at the computer. Then, set an alarm to remind me to eat lunch. I also stay in the kitchen, instead of sitting at my desk to eat.
- Spend a day off preparing healthy meals and snacks to eat throughout the week. I learned part of the reason I struggle to eat regularly is because the idea of taking time out of my work day while my son is at school to prepare my meals isn't appealing to me. On Sundays, I try to make some stuff ahead of time so I can grab, eat and go.

6. Vitamin D deficiency.

If you're like me, you sit inside a lot, and you don't drink a lot of milk.

Recently, my vitamin D levels were half the minimum. That explains why I've been so fatigued, and I'm now supplementing with a prescription.

- Make it a point to get outside in the sun for a few minutes every day during a break. When the weather allows, use one of your hourly five minute breaks to soak up the sun.
- Take a multi-vitamin. Talk to your doctor about adding a multi-vitamin into your routine if your blood work shows low levels.
- Use a sun lamp near your desk. These are helpful in the winter when the sun likes to hide. If you deal with , these can simulate sunlight and provide vitamin D.

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Health risks aside, I love being a freelancer and wouldn't change being my own boss for the world.