

Are humans wired by evolution to be couch potatoes? This evolutionary biologist believes so

A professor at Harvard and a keen marathoner – sometimes barefoot – [Daniel Liberman's] life's work in evolutionary biology makes him the ideal companion for a journey through the history of exercise, rest and health – and why a desk job might not be as bad for you as you think.

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[Daniel Liberman:] The problem is that we tell people that if they don't exercise, there's something wrong with them. But it's not a natural instinct. We have to choose to do it.

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The first step is for us to start to think differently about exercise – to understand why our bodies evolved to be physically active, but also how and why we evolved to be inactive. We're told that somehow if we don't take the stairs, there's something deficient about us. But it's completely normal, so we have to figure out ways to overcome that.

Physical inactivity is a fundamental adaptation: we evolved to save energy and that's something we don't really discuss. We have all these myths about our ancestors being incredibly fit people. The evidence says they weren't. They did as much as we did. They're not particularly strong, they're not particularly fast, they're not particularly virtuous. They had no choice to be hunter-gatherers. But they only worked a few hours a day.

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