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## Fidgeting

To fidget, from the late 17<sup>th</sup> century *fidge* 'to twitch,' means to make small movements, especially of the hands or feet, due to nervousness, impatience, agitation, or boredom. If you ever find yourself bouncing your leg over and over, tapping your foot, spinning a ring on your finger, or squirming in your chair, you are fidgeting.

According to the experts, fidgeting is a symptom of no less than 35 illnesses and disorders, including attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, generalized anxiety disorder, delirium, abdominal aortic aneurysm, heart attack, and dementia. An impressive list to be sure, but believe us when we say that if you suffer any of these maladies, fidgeting will not likely be the cornerstone of the diagnosis. More likely reasons for fidgeting are that you're simply nervous, have lots of pent-up energy, or just plain bored.

People, young and old, fidget. But not so, overweight people, according to James A. Levine, M.D.<sup>i</sup> Dr. Levine and his colleagues, all from the Mayo Clinic, have found that obese people are naturally much less fidgety than lean people and spend at least two hours more each day sitting around. The extra motion afforded by fidgeting people is apparently enough to burn about 350 extra calories a day according to Levine. This adds up to 10 to 30 pounds a year.

It has been widely reported that other people are jumping on the Levine bandwagon. They assert that his findings provide convincing evidence that desk jobs, car pools, suburban sprawl, and other environmental and lifestyle factors that discourage physical activity are to blame for obesity. It must be true. After all, have you ever seen a picture of a fat cave man?

And, lastly, research by Dr. Karen Pine and colleagues at the University of Hertfordshire found that children allowed to fidget with their hands performed better in memory and learning tests.<sup>ii</sup> They found that children

who could move their hands around freely were better at learning than pupils who were not allowed to move. Dr. Pine and her team believe that hand movements and gestures can help children think, speak, and learn.

So there you have it. Maybe fidgeting isn't a bad habit after all, just misunderstood. No matter what the facts, some people will always see fidgeting as a waste of energy and an irritation. Meanwhile, those inclined to fidget will continue to do so, all the while covertly stimulating their brains and burning calories.

#### Fidgeting Dos and Don'ts

- If a fidgeter you're not, be tolerant of those who are.
- If a fidgeter you are, be tolerant of those who aren't.

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<sup>i</sup> Levine, James A., et al., *Science*, Vol. 307, no. 5709, pp. 584 – 586, January 28, 2005.

<sup>ii</sup> Pine, K. J., et al., *Developmental Psychology*, 40 (6) 1059-1067, 2004.