

Desk Workers Should Stand, Walk 2 Hours During Workday

Diana Swift | June 02, 2015

Employees in predominantly desk-based occupations should be swapping their seats for their feet and accumulating 2 hours a day of standing and strolling walking during working hours, and eventually that should progress to 4 hours daily, according to a consensus statement published online June 1 in the *British Journal of Sports Medicine*.

Workers are advised to break seat-based tasks by periodically standing up to work, using sit-stand desks, and taking short active standing breaks, advises an expert panel led by John P. Buckley, PhD, an exercise physiologist at the University of Chester's Institute of Medicine in the United Kingdom.

The evidence is strong enough medically for US physicians to recommend workplace standing to their patients, said ergonomist Allan Hedge, PhD, a professor in the Department of Design and Environmental Analysis at Cornell University in Ithaca, New York, and a consensus panel member. "The research evidence supports action now," he told *Medscape Medical News*. "Numerous studies show that interspersing periods of sitting with standing and moving/strolling benefits circulatory function and helps regulate risk factors for obesity, diabetes, cardiovascular disease, and some cancers.

According to 2012 statistics from British Heart Foundation researchers, people spend 60% to 70% of their days being sedentary, 20% to 30% in light activity, and just 5% to 10% in moderate to vigorous activity. "For those working in offices, 65–75% of their working hours are spent sitting, of which more than 50%...is accumulated in prolonged periods of sustained sitting," the panelists write.

The panel was commissioned by Public Health England and the Active Working Community Interest Company and included both a US and an Australian member. The panelists developed the guidelines from long-term epidemiological studies of the association between sedentary lifestyle and morbidity. In the last 5 years, mounting observational evidence has linked sedentary living and working with cardiovascular disease, diabetes, cancer, depression, musculoskeletal problems, and even death.

The panelists also considered more recent interventional studies in which office workers stood and/or moved more frequently. Data emerging from observational or interventional studies suggest that more than 2 hours a day of total activity changes cardiometabolic and ergonomic risk factors such as energy expenditure, blood glucose, insulin levels, muscle function, and joint sensations. They ranked the quality of the evidence using the four levels of the American College of Sports Medicine and deemed it sufficient to generate the guidelines.

In other recommendations, the panel advises company health promotion programs to make staff members aware that prolonged sitting, aggregated from work and leisure time, may raise the risk for cardiometabolic diseases and premature mortality, independent of the individuals' exercise levels outside the office. Hence, it should be a target for modification, along with other behaviors such as smoking, excess weight, and excess alcohol consumption.

The panel also cautions that prolonged static standing postures need to be avoided as much as their seated counterparts, and that "movement does need to be checked and corrected on a regular basis especially in the presence of any musculoskeletal sensations." As for concerns about harms from working on your feet, the statement notes that occupational standing with seated and walking breaks has not been causally linked to low back and neck pain, and can even provide relief, it says.

"Although the momentum for changing sedentary working environments is already fuelling a growing market in sit-stand attachments for desks and adjustable sit-stand desktops, a simple first behavior-modifying step could be just to get people standing and moving more frequently as part of their working day. "Moreover, in the workplace, this may potentially be more socially achievable than targeted exercise," Dr Hedge said.

Despite supporting the immediate launch of the standing campaign, the panelists cite the need for large-scale prospective randomized trials assessing the effects of standing and light activity interventions in real office environments. These studies should evaluate such initiatives as movement-friendly spaces at work; computer-based activity prompts; alarmed personal motion assessment devices; locating washrooms, kitchens, and meeting places on different floors; promoting stairs over elevators; standing meetings; and delivering messages in person.

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