

# The Dangers of Prolonged Sitting

Office employees make up about 12% of the working population. While it has been known for a number of years that sitting for long periods of time is not good for you, it is only comparatively recently the true nature of this risk has become clearer.

For a long time, we have been told it's a good idea to try to exercise for about 30 minutes a day. Getting into this habit seems to improve people's quality of life and their life expectancy. However, for somebody who sits for long periods of time in their job, even getting this regular exercise seems not to provide any benefit to their health and further, they are at risk of chronic illness and dying young. Sedentary behavior or a job where there's lots of sitting essentially means any job where there is a low energy output while the person is either sitting or reclining.

Most of us estimate we sit for about five hours per day but in fact, for office workers, it's often eight to ten hours per day. For these people, 60% to 70% of their waking day is sedentary. Often, we may only exercise for about 5% of the working day.

With sedentary occupations comes the increased risk of obesity, diabetes, cardiovascular disease, cancer and an early death. This is irrespective of the amount of exercise the person gets outside of the work situation.

Sitting decreases blood flow, causes blood to pool in legs, increasing muscle fatigue and upsetting many basic metabolic processes in the body.

## TIPS TO GET ACTIVE IN THE OFFICE

So what is the solution? The important thing is to look at ways in which the sedentary time through the working day can be broken up. The exact frequency of this is not fully understood, but the more that it can be done, the better.

- Print your documents on the printer on the other side of the room, making you walk to get them
- Drink lots of water. Not only will this improve blood flow and hydration, you'll also need to walk to the toilet/ kitchen more often.
- Try a sit/ stand desk - when at your standing desk, rock backwards and forwards on the balls of your feet to increase blood flow & work your leg muscles
- Stand on one foot now and then to take pressure off your feet
- Take time out to do stretches to re-invigorate and get the blood moving
- Take the stairs...as often as you can
- Go for a short walk at lunch time, even if it's just to get some fresh air and grab a coffee
- Stand for meetings - if everyone does it you won't feel silly, better still try walking meetings
- Walk to a colleague's desk and speak with them rather than use email

It is important those in a leadership roles show the way and "walk the talk". Not only are these strategies good for you, there is now some evidence to show that these kinds of activities actually increase productivity.

## WELCOME TO OUR SUMMER NEWSLETTER



Dr Simon Ryder-Lewis

Welcome to our summer newsletter! We always aim to keep you up to date with the latest developments in Occupational Health and Safety. If you have any questions about the articles here, or if we can help with any issues you have at work, please give us a call.

### Our Services

Individual Work Site Assessment  
Walk through surveys  
Hazard identification and management  
Noise, lighting and air quality (dust) monitoring  
OOS hazard identification and management  
Health and Safety Compliance  
Pre-employment Medical exams  
UKOOA / OGUK exams  
Training for Staff and Management  
Use of personal protective equipment  
Stress and fatigue  
Understanding the HSE Act  
Influenza pandemic planning  
Manual handling  
Health Monitoring  
Work site clinics  
Absenteeism management  
Accident investigation  
Hearing and respiratory testing  
Injury management and rehabilitation  
Gradual return to work programmes  
Influenza vaccinations  
Drug and alcohol testing  
Occupational vaccinations  
Travel medicine  
Healthy Workforce Programme  
Independent Medical Opinions

# Healthy Eating and Regular Physical Activity = Healthy and Happy Workforce = Greater Productivity

Our Colleague Dr. Kelly Dale is a Dietician in Wellington and we have been discussing with her some ideas for promoting healthy eating in the work place. Here are some of her thoughts.

Healthy eating and regular physical activity can help reduce the risk of obesity and lower the risk of many chronic diseases including heart disease (by lowering blood pressure and cholesterol), stroke, some cancers and type 2 diabetes. Improving the health and well-being of employees is a vital tool that not only improves the quality of life of individuals but has a positive impact on financial measures and outputs in your company.

Healthy lifestyle choices encouraged at work among all employees can have numerous benefits for everyone including:

- Better job performance (by up to 25%)
- Greater productivity (by up to 20%)
- Lower absenteeism/sick days (by up to 27%)

How can a workplace encourage healthy eating and being active? The first step is to provide healthy and nutritious food options.

- In the staff café- negotiate healthier options in your catering contract
- In staff meetings, catered lunches and other employee events/ functions
- In vending machines - lessen the amount of fizzy drinks in these and add bottles of water

- Fruit bowl in the staff room.
- Have jugs / bottles of cold water available in the fridge

The next step is to offer regular education sessions on nutrition and activity for your work force. Put up posters and other materials around the work site which encourage healthy eating and regular physical activity. The Auckland Regional Public Health have some great resources on their website <http://www.workplacehealth.co.nz/index.cfm?PageID=76>, including healthy microwave lunches- baked beans on toast, spaghetti or soups. It's also important as part of your nutrition programme you provide nutrition counselling or a referral to for those most at need/ high risk.

Many of us are aware of the breakfast clubs provided in many NZ schools to ensure children arriving at school have breakfast in their tummies before school lessons start. Have you ever wondered what the impact on productivity is when your employees turn up for work on an empty stomach?

Late last year we caught a news article on TV3's Campbell Live about a moving company in Auckland who



provided breakfast for its employees. The employees would arrive at work an hour early to have breakfast. They paid for the food and planned their menus.

This company, after introducing the scheme, noticed an 11% increase in productivity, staff turn-over was next to nothing, their sick leave rates dropped dramatically and everyone was turning up for work on time.

This is an innovative scheme and the company is to be congratulated. Here is the weblink if you are interested.

<http://www.3news.co.nz/The-benefits-of-breakfast-for-adults/tabid/423/articleID/300686/Default.aspx>

One of the staff members in the video clip talks about how he always went to school without breakfast so this company is helping to break an intergenerational habit. They also include education in their programme around healthy eating options and budgetary advice. Is this something you may be able to adapt to your workplace?

Dr. Dale also recommends providing opportunities for regular physical activity e.g. walk breaks at lunchtime, staff sports teams, gym on site, encouraging staff to take the stairs instead of the lift.

If you would like to get in touch with Kelly for further advice we would be happy to put you in touch with her. Please just give us a call or email.

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