

Are Sit-Stand Desks Good for You?

Too much of anything is bad for you. This of course, as we know, includes fried foods, alcohol, sweets and now sitting.

In the past 3-4 years a number of scientific studies have been published indicating sitting all day is not good for your health. As a result sit stand desks are becoming more common in the work place. A sit-stand desk is one that adjusts from a sitting to a standing position (and back) throughout the day. They allow the user a quick and easy transition from sitting to standing position. So please don't think you can take the chairs away!



These desks can involve a considerable investment for a company so it is important the correct education and equipment goes with them. There are key benefits to both sitting and standing at a workstation, these include both physiological and financial.

- Standing while you work engages your back muscles which results in reduced musculoskeletal symptoms such as back and neck pain
- Staff may feel more energetic and creative, and less tired and stressed.
- Some studies indicate a decrease in sick leave rates and early reporting of discomfort pain or injury rates
- Standing while working burns a lot more calories than sitting which helps with maintaining a healthy body weight.
- When your muscles flex regularly through standing this supports healthy blood flow which in turn helps to keep blood sugar levels regulated, keeps blood pressure lower and may reduce the risk of Heart

disease and diabetes.

- It is consistent with OOS guidelines regarding the importance of regular changes in posture.
- Increased productivity due higher levels of engagement and focus
- More flexible, mobile and collaborative personnel.
- Stand up meetings tend to be more focused, shorter and more productive.

Even if you do the recommended 30 minutes of rigorous exercise per day this is not enough to cancel out the effects of prolonged sitting.

A company exploring the option of sit stand desks may consider trialing 1 or 2 for staff to essentially use as a 'hot desk', that is- it is shared by a number of staff. It's also important to be mindful that standing has its own hazards which may or may not contribute to a successful utilisation of the equipment. You want them to be more than a passing fad.

If you have a standing desk which is not height adjustable make sure you provide stools for staff to enable them to take the weight off their feet for short periods during the day. We need to also consider the lessons of those workers where standing is the only option; supermarket checkout operators, factory workers or retail assistants - anti fatigue matting and supportive footwear are norms in those industries.

Adoption and incorporation of these measures into the office culture will assist individuals to be prepared for the change in working conditions. There is more to it than just buying a desk; it involves a change in office culture. To do this you need buy-in from all levels within the organisation.

Leaders need to 'walk the talk'!

Cont.

WELCOME TO OUR SUMMER NEWLETTER



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

Are Sit-Stand Desks... (cont.)

A recent study (2013) in Australia by the University of Sydney in conjunction with the Australian Heart foundation noted a range of factors encouraged staff to use workstations in a standing position. These may be helpful to you if you are considering sit-stand desks in your office.

- The ease of moving the workstation up and down
- Wearing comfortable, flat shoes
- Feeling physical benefits, such as less back pain, from sitting less
- Feeling more energetic and alert, especially later in the working day
- Perceived improvements in productivity from working while standing
- Seeing others standing, which acted as a visual prompt to also stand up
- A supportive work environment that accepted standing as normal practice, even in an open plan office
- Formation of a new habit over time, and developing the physical capacity to gradually stand for longer periods.

There were also some barriers identified in the study which also will need consideration:

1. A number of people in the study initially felt self-conscious standing, especially

taking phone calls in the open plan office, or doing confidential work, for which they usually elected to sit down. For many, this feeling lessened over time, especially as more people participated in the study.

2. Some employees felt they were more easily distracted when standing, or that it was inviting other people to interrupt them.
3. The wrong type of footwear (for example, high heels) was also noted as a barrier among women.
4. Finally, workstation design limitations were an issue for a number of users so it is important to research carefully the various designs available and choose one that is appropriate for your company, staff and workspace.

There are a number of ways office-based workplaces can support a more active culture in the workplace. These range from simple, low cost options through to changes in office furniture and design. For example:

- Inclusion of a standing break during meetings – make standing an agenda item
- Provision of height adjustable meeting room tables
- Providing standing bar tables in the staff lunch rooms
- Displaying posters that encourage standing breaks and stair use

- Utilising software that prompts employees to stand up and/or take a break from their computer
- Providing suggested local routes for walking meetings
- Installing height adjustable 'hot-desks' that employees can share
- Offering employees sit-stand workstations or height adjustable desks, in lieu of traditional desks.

There are also many ways employees can move more and decrease extended sitting time throughout their working day. Simple tips include:

- Using the stairs instead of the lift
- Standing and taking a regular break from your computer, such as every 30 minutes
- Taking a standing break during meetings, or trying a standing meeting –they tend to be shorter too!
- Standing to greet a visitor to your workspace
- Walking to a colleague's desk instead of phoning or emailing
- Drinking more water – going to the water cooler and toilet will break up sitting time
- Moving the bin away from your desk so you have to get up more regularly

Health & Safety Reform Bill Update

The Bill is currently before parliament. It is likely the Bill will come into force in the second half of 2015, not the 1st of April as previously thought.

There will be adequate time of some months between when the Bill is passed and when it comes into force to make sure duty holders are aware of their responsibilities under the new law. Now is the time for your Health and Safety teams to make preparations for the proposed changes.

Keep an eye on the Worksafe New Zealand website for regular updates

<http://www.business.govt.nz/worksafe/about/reform>

If you require any advice, please don't hesitate to contact us.

HEALTH AND SAFETY REFORM BILL UPDATE

WORKSAFE
NEW ZEALAND

What The Bill Proposes



This update focuses on items 10 and expands the new Regulations & Guidance in the Bill. Consequently, this document does not contain the full text of the Health and Safety at Work Act. The Bill is still subject to the legislative process and accordingly may differ in content between now and its passage into law. This document is intended to be used for information purposes only, to enable readers to understand key concepts and provisions in the Bill, in its current form.

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