

Stand up for health

Workers who sit at least eight hours a day are at higher risk for increased earlier mortality rates.

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Sitting all day at a desk job can be detrimental to your health. In fact, depending on what you do outside your work day, it can shave years off your life. Studies show that a sedentary lifestyle causes premature death, usually related to cardiovascular disease, diabetes, cancer, obesity, depression and more. Research from the University of Sydney, Australia, found that people who sit for 11 hours or more a day are 40 percent more likely to die sooner than those who sit for fewer than four hours. Those who sit for between eight hours and 11 hours a day were also at higher risk for increased earlier mortality rates. Researchers say that while working out at the gym during leisure time helps, it may not be enough to offset the negative impacts of sitting all day at work.

The key is to get moving. Standing and walking during the day while at the office keeps circulation flowing and ailments away. A key part of the message delivered by your office ergonomic assessors during workstation evaluations is encouragement to change working postures regularly; get up and move around. This is because of strong scientific findings that prolonged sitting is a high risk factor for many negative health outcomes. In contrast, breaks from seated activity such as walking or standing to work have been correlated with pronounced health benefits.

Likewise, sedentary work practices can potentially affect the number of workers' compensation claims filed by your agency or university. Many factors contribute to workplace musculoskeletal disorders (MSDs), not the least of which are office workspaces that tend to limit movement. For example, some workstations are highly efficient and may have a printer in close proximity. This set-up tends to minimize a worker's need to get up and move around, thereby reinforcing sedentary work practices. Relocating the printer farther away, requiring workers to get up and walk to it, encourages more movement during the day. Offering a standing work option along with information about the health benefits of standing to work would be an even better way to offset the unhealthy effects of sedentary work.

What can agency leaders do to help? Encourage employees to take periodic micro-breaks from the work task; make it OK to take "walking breaks" during the day; provide sit/stand workstation options for those interested in standing to work. A modular sit/stand computer workstation costs between \$600 and \$900. In many agencies, these are provided only to workers who have experienced an MSD claim. This approach may be just the opposite of what the studies suggest as a preferred best practice and may not be the most economically feasible. For example, for the 2011 policy year, SAIF accepted 347 MSD claims from the State of Oregon and Oregon University System. While MSDs made up only 17.7 percent of total accepted claims, they were responsible for more than 25 percent of all paid costs, averaging more than \$7,000 per claim. For those MSD claims where lost time was incurred, the average cost jumped significantly higher to \$15,000. This does not take into account the additional indirect costs of claims, such as lost productivity, increased overtime, increased absenteeism, and even decreased morale as other workers must pick up additional duties from their injured counterparts. (OSHA states that the indirect costs of claims can be as high as 20 times the direct costs.)

Please consider the steps you can take to help "mobilize" your seated workforce. Get employees out of their seats and moving. Encourage and enable standing and walking at work for part of each day. This will provide them with significant health benefits and will help reduce the expensive comorbidity factors when MSD cases do occur.

You can find more information at [Australian Government Comcare](#) and [BMC Public Health](#).



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