No More Sitting Down on the Job
HOW TO INCORPORATE STANDING INTO YOUR WORKDAY

Standing-height desks offer numerous health and ergonomic benefits to the user while increasing worker productivity.

How much time do you spend sitting? If you’re like most people, it’s probably the better part of your waking day. When not sleeping, the average person sits about eight hours per day. We’ve gone from an active society to one that now spends large amounts of time in idle positions – at work, on the commute, watching TV. It’s no wonder obesity is at an all-time high. Plopped in front of a computer during much of a 40+ hour workweek, people with desk jobs are almost required to sit in order to get their work done. It’s certainly not a healthy position to be in. Our bodies were made to move, not be static, which is why extensive periods of sitting are the root of many health problems.

Prolonged sitting can be hazardous to your health

Pain. You’ll feel it in your neck, shoulders, back, hips and knees. We rarely exhibit a flattering posture when seated, especially at a desk. We slouch – with back curved, shoulders forward and head awkwardly out in front. It’s not pretty to look at, and it certainly isn’t good for our bodies. “Sitting can be tough on your entire body,” reports ergonomist, Denise Vester, of Ergonomic Design, Inc. in Westminster, Colorado. “When you sit, your muscles atrophy and almost go to sleep. A forward head position common of seated individuals creates pressure where our head and neck meet, causing muscle tightness that can lead to headaches. This unnatural position also stresses the junction between the neck and shoulders where the upper back comes together and applies undue pressure to rotator cuff muscles.”

A rounded back prevents proper spine support, placing increased pressure on our discs. When these important lumbar support structures are stressed, we’re more susceptible to lumbar disc disease and lower back pain. Caused by sensitivity to too much sitting, Vester says acute disc problems can be a real challenge to fix. Carpal tunnel, tennis elbow, tendonitis, varicose veins and blood clots can also develop from too much sitting.

Our bodies go idle the second we sit. We burn less energy, and electrical activity in the muscles takes a dip. Enzyme productivity drops by a whopping 90 percent, increasing your risk for heart disease. The less you move, the less blood sugar your body utilizes. Sitting hampers insulin effectiveness in just one day’s time and produces a cascade of detrimental effects that even regular exercise can’t negate.

“Standing helps mitigate all of these problems,” confirms Vester. “It places our joints in more appropriate positions, resulting in better blood flow to legs and hips. It activates core, arm and leg muscles while improving back health.”
In addition to the musculoskeletal benefits standing provides, there’s physiological gain seen too by more desirable blood sugar and blood pressure levels.”

Recent studies show that office workers and others who sit for extended periods can improve their health and productivity by standing periodically throughout the day. According to a study conducted by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), standing reduced muscle fatigue and upper back and neck pain in participants by 54 percent. When their standing workstations were removed, the workers’ pain returned within two weeks.

How often should you take a break from sitting? Experts recommend standing up every 20 minutes. “Get up, stretch your arms over your head and move your feet around – it makes a huge difference,” notes designer and ergonomic product specialist, Mari-ann Carlson. “A little bit of standing throughout your day is better than sitting three to four hours in a row. Alternating between sitting and standing is important as too much of either position can be stressful on your body.”

The benefits of being vertical

Burn calories. Improve posture. Tone muscles. Ramp up metabolism by breaking down sugars and fats quicker. Increase bloodflow and oxygen levels. Concentrate better. Be more productive. Standing helps you accomplish all of this and then some.

Did you know you can actually lose weight by simply standing more? It burns three times as many calories as sitting. “Standing up and moving around helps reduce your risk of obesity and diabetes,” says Vester, “while also improving your concentration level and mood. Even if a person changed nothing else about their lifestyle other than to stand more frequently, it would prove beneficial. If you couple that with regular exercise, the benefits are even greater.”

Standing gives us energy. It gets our blood flowing and oxygen circulating, making our minds more alert and focused, and thus, more productive. “Standing is our natural posture,” says Vester. “When you go from sitting to standing, you immediately improve your posture and eliminate weight-bearing pressure on your spine. When sitting, you literally compress your spine, neck and internal organs, reducing oxygen and blood flow. Standing opens up your airways and also aids in better digestion.”

Stand while you work

How can you transform your stationary desk job into an active, calorie-burning, productivity-boosting occupation? Buy a desk you can comfortably work at from a standing position, and break up the monotony of sitting at your desk all day. An attractive alternative to the typical desk and chair model, standing-height desks are becoming quite popular because they allow a person to perform their regular tasks while also improving their health.

Standing-height desks are catching on in many corporate environments. They are a win-win for both employer and employee – offering many health and ergonomic benefits, while creating more alert and productive employees. A sedentary lifestyle and its unhealthy side effects are costly not only to the individual, but for employers as well. Healthy employees incur lower health care costs, miss less work and are more productive overall. We experience higher levels of serotonin in our brains when our bodies are active, creating a happier worker. Standing also improves communication, giving employees a chance to talk with co-workers at eye level as they walk by; it’s more personable than sending emails.
Available in various dimensions, standing desks are large enough to accommodate your computer(s) while still providing adequate workspace, but also come in compact sizes for tight spaces. Made from attractive and durable materials, standing-height desks come in all sorts of sleek styles to offer a perfect blend of quality and elegance that beautifully enhances any work space while coordinating smartly with a variety of furnishings and décor. Some desks feature built-in, drop-down keyboard trays and desktop data ports and USB ports. Built-in wire management systems keep cables and other cords tucked neatly out of sight.

**L-shaped workstations enable quick sit/stand functionality**

Workstations featuring a standing-height work surface on one side and a standard-height work surface or sitting desk on another, give you the best of both worlds, allowing you to sit or stand while performing your work without ever leaving your workstation. The standing-height L-desk makes it very easy to stay active throughout the workday. “As you tire in one position, you can seamlessly shift to another,” says Carlson. “Plus, it creates much more collaborative work environments.”

**Adjustable-height options combine a sitting/standing desk into one**

Height-adjustable tables featuring mechanical, pneumatic or electrical lifts give desks built-in flexibility, providing you with the option to easily alternate between sitting and standing throughout your workday without actually leaving your desk. They’re versatile enough to use from a sitting or standing position to accommodate various working styles. With just the push of a button, you can move an electric adjustable standing-height table up or down to conform to the work at hand. Commonly adjustable from approximately 27 inches up to 47 inches, these automated, standing-height products support workers of different heights and can easily adjust to serve multiple users, ensuring an appropriate and comfortable fit for you.

**Standing-height islands and conference tables keep meetings on track**

Standing during meetings helps people stay on topic and “think on their feet” so they can quickly spring into action when the meeting is done. An adjustable-height conference table helps make meetings lively and productive, while adjustable-height chairs/stools can provide a resting spot for long sessions.
A standing-height island can act as a central work area or meeting place, giving people options to sit or stand, while also offering plenty of storage and file space. Walk-up workstations give teleworkers and visitors a spot to check email or jot down notes. Islands also make an attractive, functional addition to lobbies, file rooms and other shared spaces.

**Height-adjustable computer equipment enables you to stand at any desk**

Through the use of telescoping monitor arms and height-adjustable keyboard trays, a person can acquire sit/stand adaptation in one place in a simple and inexpensive manner. It enables you to move the monitor up to eye-level and your keyboard from sitting to standing height without moving the desk itself or replacing it with a standing-height option. The downside to this is that you don’t have the ability to raise and lower the entire work surface – just your computer equipment.

**Pay attention to ergonomics**

The ideal height for your standing desk is at or slightly below elbow height so you can position your forearms at a 90-degree angle on the desk surface. A 90- to 105-degree angle at your elbows and no bend in your wrists is the best way to avoid repetitive stress injuries like carpal tunnel syndrome. “Your arms should not be raised too high or reaching too low,” shares Vester. Your face should be 20 to 28 inches or about an arm’s length away from your computer screen, and the monitor should be tilted about 20 degrees so you tuck your chin just slightly. “Adapting the work environment to the worker instead of vice versa is the best definition of ergonomics,” adds Vester.
Adapting to a new working style

Transitioning your workday from sitting to standing is a drastic change and one you must ease into. “Don’t go from sitting all day to standing all day,” warns Carlson. “You’ll just create new health problems.”

Standers must build up their endurance. The amount of time a person can tolerate standing is an individual preference that takes your weight and health status into account. It will be very easy for some people; for others, it will take more effort. For instance, standing a lengthy time would be more difficult for a 350-pound person versus someone weighing 130 pounds. “Start with just a minute or two, then continue to increase the length of time you stand by ten percent,” says Carlson. “Five to six minutes an hour is the minimum a person should stand.”

Vester says the ultimate goal is to stand for a total of half your workday. “That doesn’t mean standing four to five hours straight, but rather, breaking it up into realistic blocks of time.” Tailor your workday around sitting and standing and decide what tasks would be better suited to each position. Work requiring a lot of brainpower may be best completed while standing. Once fatigued, you might decide to sit a bit while catching up on email.

Your body may be sore the first few weeks, especially your legs and feet, so go easy on yourself. When you’re tired, sit down and rest. Set goals and incorporate more standing as your body adjusts. “You can’t start working out an hour a day if you haven’t done it in 20 years,” says Vester. “The same goes for standing. You don’t want to walk away from work feeling like you got hit by a truck. Stand for a total of 30 minutes per day this week, an hour the next week. Everyone can achieve the desired level of daily standing – you just have to work at it.”

Look for opportunities to stand during your workday whenever you can – get up to make phone calls, eat lunch, or hold meetings. Add movement into your day too – go get a drink of water, ask a question in person instead of sending an email, and if you work from home, put your printer further away from your desk.

Get started now

Ready to rid yourself of the negative health ramifications associated with excessive sitting, and say goodbye to bodily aches and pains? Dividing your day into regular intervals of sitting and standing is critical for maintaining a healthy lifestyle, and a standing-height desk will give you the flexibility you need to stand for certain tasks.

“Many of the problems I encounter as an ergonomist are caused by too much sitting,” concludes Vester. “Prevention is worth a pound of cure. Early detection accompanied by a lifestyle change can resolve most of these injuries and prevent new ones from occurring.”

In your search for a standing-height solution, seek the help of a furniture professional who specializes in ergonomically friendly products with the ability to offer you an ample choice of desks and tables that you can use as complete sets or in combination with your existing furniture.

Begin your search for the ideal standing-height solution for your office space. Contact NBF for free office space planning and design services today: 800.558.1010, web code 422189.

REFERENCES
7. Vester. “The same goes for standing. You don’t want to walk away from work feeling like you got hit by a truck. Stand for a total of 30 minutes per day this week, an hour the next week. Everyone can achieve the desired level of daily standing – you just have to work at it.”