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ERGONOMICS

Sit-stand to your full potential

The sit-stand desk has become commonplace in offices in recent years – but are they delivering the desired benefits? asks **Guy Osmond**

Sitting down for long periods can cause discomfort and potentially lead to musculoskeletal problems, and sedentary behaviour has also been linked with a higher risk of type II diabetes, cardiovascular disease, and some cancers.

Yet many office workers spend 70-85% of their time at work sitting. Used correctly, sit-stand desks can improve wellbeing and productivity – but in many cases they are underused or inappropriately used, with the potential to create health and safety issues.

The challenges

Many suppliers deliver sit-stand desks with insufficient information to set them up correctly or to use them effectively. The result is often:

- Poor posture;
- Incorrect height adjustment; and
- People standing for too long.

However, for the expense of sit-stand desks to be justified, purchase and installation must be followed with training and support.

Here's how to maximise the benefits of sit-stand desks.

1. Switch between postures

Standing for long periods can be bad for you too, leading to varicose veins or foot problems.

It's not so much about standing but moving from one posture to another – that's where the benefit is.

A useful ratio is five to six minutes of standing for 30 minutes sitting.

2. Focus on quality posture and positioning

It is easy to replace a poor sitting posture with a poor standing posture. Many users set the desk too low, and end up slouched forward, leaning on the desk with their head tilted up at the screen creating an uncomfortable 'vulture neck'. Many lock their knees which restricts blood flow.

You should stand upright with legs apart and slightly bent, with one foot marginally in front of the other. Your elbows should be level with the desk.



Raise or tilt the monitor so the visible screen top is just below eye level in order to avoid tipping your head forward.

How can facilities and workplace managers help?

1. Treat sit-stand desks as a workplace culture change – make sure all staff understand the reasons and the benefits of using your new sit-stand desks.
2. Provide education – ensure the desks are set up and used effectively. That might be through training, both in-person or using the intranet. You might have signs and displays on the desks or around the office or use an internal social media platform.
3. Empower staff to change – if everyone continues to sit, no one will feel able to move their desk up and stand. You need to build a culture where people take breaks, and movement is accepted and encouraged.
4. Implement nudges – invite staff to set reminders to shift position using free apps or more sophisticated software that can trigger reminders on computer screens or even on the desks themselves. Encourage people to stand for certain tasks and activities such as sorting paperwork or whenever a colleague comes over for a quick conversation.
5. Find your champions – their enthusiasm will help to shift the mindset of reluctant colleagues.

Sit-stand desks are a powerful tool. Implemented correctly they can help trigger a culture shift away from static, sedentary working environments to offices that encourage movement – a shift that can be transformative for health, wellbeing and productivity. 🔄



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