

Attention all Employers: **Sitting is the new smoking.**

Dr James Levine, Director of the Mayo Clinic at Arizona State University, found that sitting at a desk for 5 or more hours in a day is the health equivalent of smoking a pack and a quarter of cigarettes in terms of the expected reduction in life expectancy.

Researchers at the Australian National University and Sydney University also discovered a direct link between hours of uninterrupted sitting and likelihood of early death. 200 000 people were followed for 3 years, and those who sat for more than 11 hours a day had a 40% increased risk of early death compared with those who sat for less than 4 hours a day. Studies all over the world have yielded similar results.

Prolonged sitting increases the likelihood of developing type 2 diabetes, cancer, obesity, heart disease, stroke and back pain even if a person engages in regular physical exercise. The association is consistent across all sexes and age groups.

Too much sitting is a global health hazard making people more prone to debilitating and life-threatening chronic diseases. This translates into more absenteeism, less productivity and poorer work performance.

Sitting also seriously impacts mental health. More time spent seated is associated with increased risk of mental illness, psychological distress, anxiety and depression.

But there is good news - and as an employer you can be at the forefront of big positive health reforms. **A simple way to counteract the negative effects of prolonged sitting is to stand up for 2 minutes every 20 minutes.** Organisations that create a culture in which people stand up every half hour and have access to stand-up desks experience **significant improvements in productivity, engagement and interpersonal relationships.**

By standing up frequently, your employee will not be losing time spent working. A person can still be reading, typing and making phone calls (in fact people report feeling more confident and competent when speaking on the phone while standing). They just need to stretch their legs and weight-bear for a few minutes.

Walking throughout the day is also highly beneficial so perhaps you could organise meetings on the move instead of around the board table? Can you encourage employees to leave their desk at lunchtime and go outside? I cannot overemphasise the **benefits to the individual and the organisation as a whole when people are less sedentary.** People who stand up regularly report fewer headaches, reduced shoulder tension, less back pain and **greater concentration, alertness and energy** throughout the day.

Standing desks are becoming increasingly mainstream in leading-edge companies such as Google, Apple, Chevron, Intel, Boeing and universities around the world. Standing desks need not be expensive - there are solutions for all budgets and work situations.

I am also concerned that **sedentary jobs could become the next biggest wave of health lawsuits** since the occupational overuse syndrome and repetitive strain injury (RSI).

I have no affiliation with any stand-up desk providers or services. I am a concerned medical practitioner who passionately believes that education is more powerful than medication and that small changes can make a big difference.

Please don't hesitate to contact me if you'd like to discuss this further or obtain more information. You can also click on the following link to read the Australian Government report on the hazards of prolonged sitting.

<https://www.safeworkaustralia.gov.au/system/files/documents/1702/literature-review-of-the-hazards-of-sedentary-work.pdf>

Yours faithfully,
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