

To Sit or to Stand?

(That is the question and here are some answers!)

Today’s workplace requires employees to spend more time at their workstation, attached to their computer, than ever before. Along the way there have been many innovations to help improve posture, health, and wellness for these computer professionals. Many have proved to be extremely beneficial (stretch breaks, adjustable chairs), many have proved to be unbeneficial fads (kneeling chairs), and many have fallen at both ends and everywhere in between based on the individual utilizing it. In the world of workstation setups, it is truly not one size fits all.



Recently, the newest idea to be implemented into the workstation/ergonomic battle is the standing station. Many have transitioned to these new stations with mixed results. Many thrive while standing while many others revert back to sitting. Before making a choice on which would be best for you or your employees, it’s best to research the benefits and risks associated with each setup.

The Dark Side of Sitting

Over the past few years, a lot of research has been done on prolonged sitting at these new workstations and the effects on the human body. Prolonged sitting increases the risks of:

- Cardiovascular disease
- Obesity
- Increased BMI
- Joint dysfunction due to poor postures



- Metabolic Syndrome
- Type 2 Diabetes
- Deep Vein Thrombosis
- Low Back Disorders
- Increased Blood Pressure

Reduce the Sitting Risks

There are many steps that can be taken to reduce the risks associated with prolonged sitting:

- Utilize supportive and ergonomically correct office equipment.
 - Chairs with adjustable lumbar support, height, and seat pan length
 - Correct positioning of monitor, keyboard, and mouse
 - Consider equipment to meet your ergonomic needs – keyboard tray, monitor stand, document stand, and a new keyboard or mouse to assess ergonomic needs
- Consider making an appointment with an ergonomist to properly adjust equipment and educate you on proper sitting and typing postures.

- When sitting for prolonged amount of time, take standing breaks every 30 – 60 minutes. Use this time to perform stretches, perform a task such as reading or talking on the phone while standing, or focus on adjusting your posture.
- Take walks. Use the break to walk to another area of the office to file, make copies, or visit coworkers. If it's a nice day, take a walk outside!
- Listen to your body! Aches, pains, and muscle soreness are all signs of your body telling you something is out of balance. Don't ignore these messages! Take the time to review what may be causing these aches then make adjustments or call an ergonomist to review and correct.

Shall we Stand?

These health risks have led many to free themselves from the confines of a chair and adopt a standing station. Many benefits have been attributed to standing stations. These are based on a mix of research and theory. Besides looking to escape the health concerns of prolonged sitting, there are many other benefits touted with using a standing station:

- Increase Blood Circulation
- Better Blood Sugar Regulation
- Lowered Blood Pressure
- Increased Metabolism Due to Activity
- Strengthen Core Stability
- Release Restless Energy to Improve Focus

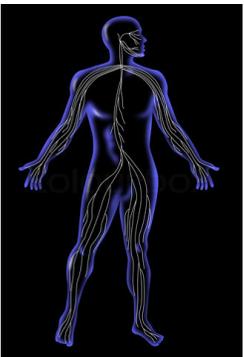


The Dark Side of Standing

For all the proposed benefits of switching to a standing station, there are just as many complications and problems associated with standing stations. These concerns are the result of three major areas. These areas involve health concerns, personal reflection from workers who have adopted standing stations and cost of change.

Health Concerns with Prolonged Standing

- Research from Cornell University shows prolonged standing increases the risk of Carotid Atherosclerosis (degeneration of arteries) nine fold
- Increase in musculoskeletal disorders associated with feet, knees, hips, and low back
- Increased risk of varicose veins
- Increased risk of spider veins
- Increased risk of stroke due to increase in blood clotting problems
- Foot problems such as nerve compression and plantar fasciitis
- Swelling in lower extremities



Personal Reflections from Standing Station Users

- Increased fatigue at the end of the day
- Reports of increased pain in low back, hips, knees, and feet
- Less Privacy
- More Distractions
- Many find they revert to sitting for most of the day



- New desk if current is not adjustable (\$800+)
- Pedestal Chairs (\$500+)
- Footrest for proper support (\$75+)
- Keyboard tray (Standing height is usually different from pedestal chair height) (\$200+)
- Miscellaneous costs associated with footwear, floor mats, etc.



Other Considerations

- High pedestal chairs used at standing stations do not have proper foot support to reduce pressures on legs and hips.
- Proper keyboard height for proper typing postures is fitted for standing, but not adjustable to correct height when sitting

Reduce the Standing Risks

There are many considerations and adjustments that can be made to reduce to risks associated with prolonged standing.

- Make sure the height of the desktop is measured to ensure proper typing and standing postures
- Just because you are standing, don't neglect the need to take stretch breaks and to walk around as needed
- Be sure to utilize proper standing postures with weight evenly distributed
- Be aware not to lean on desks or equipment when fatigued
- Consider sitting later in the day as your body becomes more fatigued from prolonged standing
- When using pedestal chair, be sure to have appropriate foot support to promote proper sitting postures
- When switching between standing and sitting tasks, make sure monitor, keyboard, and mouse are able to be adjusted to proper heights to reduce strain on eyes, neck, and shoulders
- Many companies are currently marketing and developing adjustable monitor/keyboard stands that allow for a personalized sit/stand option



Recommendations

The debate of sitting vs. standing will continue, but the best conclusion is that it is not an “either-or” decision. There are clear complications and benefits from sitting and standing. It is best to consider a daily mix of sitting, standing, and, most important, moving. By preventing yourself from becoming stagnant, you not only reduce the risks from either prolonged sitting or prolonged standing, but you also break up the monotony of your usual workday.

Workstations are not a “one size fits all” decision. The individual worker needs to educate themselves on the benefits and risks of not only their workstation, but also of their own health, posture, and well-being.