



SAFETY AWARENESS: EXERCISE BALLS & TREADMILL DESKS

Two trendy, yet controversial products have been a topic of discussion throughout Vermont; exercise ball chairs and treadmill desks. Many of us spend a lot of our workday on the computer, in the static seated position. It's understandable that we want to move more! However, we need to make sure we are doing so safely. Below is further information on the two products, as well as some viable alternatives.

Exercise Balls

The Office of Risk Management *does not recommend* exercise balls, or fitness balls, as full-time task chairs. They do not offer proper adjustability or lumbar support when in use. While the engagement of the core may offer some short term positive effects, over time they exhaust the body quicker and can cause elevated risks of fatigue and strain. The additional hazards of possible loss of balance and the ball rolling away when standing also suggest they are not advisable as full-time task chairs. Working while sitting in a quality adjustable task chair, ordered through State approved contracts, combined with periodic movement is a smarter and safer solution.

Treadmill Desks

The Office of Risk Management *does not recommend* treadmill desks, or walking pads at desks. A number of reputable organizations and universities have taken the same approach. At first thought, it may seem like a great way to be able to burn calories while you are working on your computer. However, there are heightened safety concerns that quickly offset any possible benefit. Risks of a misstep with multitasking, increased fatigue, dehydration, and potential mechanical issues all highlight the reluctance to permit these in a work setting.

Alternative Recommendations

Sit-to-Stand Workstations

Several benefits have been shown when changing positions every 30-45 minutes. A sit-to-stand workstation (adjustable electric desk, fixed raised desk, or table-top equipment) can help provide many of the benefits that are often desired from those who wish to have a treadmill desk. While there aren't the same calories burned, the long term impact of prolonged static posture is greatly reduced.

Taking Micro-breaks

Our bodies are not designed to be in the same position all day long. It's important that with or without a sit-to-stand workstation, employees are also taking micro-breaks throughout the day to allow for more complete movement than what is typically required at a desk. Going on walks, making copies, filling up a water bottle, and doing some light stretching are all great ways to get up and move. Trying to do so twice an hour, even for 2 or 3 minute periods, will help reduce muscle fatigue and stiffness at the end of the work day.

Proper Adjustable Task Chair

An adjustable task chair that provides the proper support and comfort is essential. Features such as adjustable lumbar support, seat length, armrests, and tilt tension control help create customized support.

Any desk, chair, computer, mouse or keyboard needs to be ordered through State approved contracts or through ADS. Please contact AOA.RiskManagement@vermont.gov with any questions.