

Sitting less good for health

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IT's well established that spending too long sitting down is bad for you. But at work, it's not always easy to counter being sedentary. However, adjusting your workstation could benefit your health without impacting your productivity, according to a study published in the journal 'IISE Transactions' on Occupational Ergonomics and Human Factors.



A research team from Texas A&M University has investigated the effects of spending long hours sitting down on office workers, who sit for most of their eight-hour working days. It is not uncommon for them to suffer from symptoms resulting from physical inactivity, such as daytime exhaustion, hypertension and musculoskeletal pain.

To protect their employees, some companies are equipping themselves with alternative furniture, such as height-adjustable sit-stand desks. But are they really effective in preventing the onset of health problems linked to sedentary work?

To answer this question, the authors of this research followed 79 full-time office workers at a major university. They divided these volunteers into three groups according to the workstation they used (traditional, sit-stand or standing).

The researchers collected demographic data on the participants and information on how they used office equipment such as footrests, articulated arms for computer screens, keyboard trays or anti-fatigue mats. At the same time, the scientists measured their levels of physical activity and productivity.

Unsurprisingly, the researchers found that participants who didn't sit on a chair for long hours were in better shape than others. Only 51.7 per cent of the group using standing desks complained of back pain, compared with 80 per cent of those working seated. These volunteers also tended to expend more energy than others, and therefore to be more physically active.

As for productivity, the researchers found no obvious differences between the groups. In other words, you can work just as well standing as you can sitting down. "The bottom line is that the risk of health issues from sedentary work can be eased through alternative desk options, like sit-stand or stand-biased workstations," explains study co-author, Kaysey Aguilar, quoted in a news release. "These are winwin solutions because they benefit worker's health while maintaining the high productivity employers expect."