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DECEMBER 2012 ISSUE



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Should We Take a Stand?

An article by Julie Dubas, OTR/L

Every now and then there is a new trend in ergonomics. Lately, I have been reading studies about the perils of prolonged sitting and the recommendations for a standing or sit/stand workstation. Is this hype, or is there a benefit to this recommendation? Let's look at what the studies show us.

- Sedentary jobs have increased 83% since 1950, and physically active jobs now make up only about 25% of our workforce. That is 50% less than in 1950.
- Adult (and childhood) obesity/overweight level continues to increase: 65% of all Adults are obese or overweight. Obesity costs American companies \$225.8B per year in health-related productivity losses. An obese employee costs an employer an additional \$460 to \$2,500 in medical costs and sick days per year.

Many studies have been performed on the effects of prolonged sitting. Here are the results of those studies:

- In people aged 45 and older, those who spend 11 or more hours a day sitting are 40 percent more likely to die over the next three years regardless of how physically active they are otherwise.
- Sitting and watching television has been linked to increased risk of type 2 diabetes, cardiovascular disease, and all-cause mortality.
- Participants who spent 10 or more years in sedentary work had almost twice the risk of distal colon cancer and a 44% increased risk of rectal cancer.
- Prolonged sitting was associated with higher levels of inflammatory markers in the blood, higher body weight and lower levels of HDL, or good cholesterol.

So... sitting is bad. It makes sense and few people would disagree that being sedentary is bad for you. But how about standing? Should we get rid of our couches and chairs and go out and buy a \$300-\$1,000 standing workstation? Here is what the studies say about prolonged standing:

- Standing increases the risk for atherosclerosis (hardening of the heart arteries) in men and possibility of increase stroke risk.

Continued on next page...

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Sitting in classrooms may not be the best way for children to learn

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- Leg muscles get tired and their tendons and ligaments can be damaged, causing soft tissue injuries such as plantar fasciitis and knee, hip and low back arthritis and pain.
- Standing reduces blood flow to muscles and veins get inflamed and/or feet, ankles and legs swell and muscles start to ache.

If prolonged sitting and prolonged standing are bad for you, what are we to do? Vary our positions throughout the day. If you have a sedentary job, intermittent brief periods of standing throughout the day can improve circulation, muscle tone and energy. If you stand all day, get a sit/stand chair to decrease stress on the joints. Here are some other benefits from changing your posture during the day:

- Standing for just two hours during an average workday can burn an extra 280 calories. In one year, that could potentially provide a weight loss of around 20 pounds.
- They also found that standing up uses blood glucose and may discourage the development of diabetes and improves your HDL or good cholesterol levels.
- Standing while you work improves concentration by increasing blood flow to the brain. Many who stand state that their thinking is clearer and they have an improved ability to focus on problems.

So there is a benefit to a sit/stand desk, and some people even take it a step further and have a slow treadmill in front of the computer, have a television attached to an exercise bike so the television only works while you pedal, or even sit on an exercise ball or rocking chair. However the sit/stand desk tends to be expensive and not very easy to test in person and the others, well... may not be very practical. The one thing to get from this article is that your body is designed to move and it causes problems if you don't, so get up and move! Try to incorporate standing/walking during the day such as standing while talking on the phone, walking to a co-worker's desk instead of sending an instant message, taking the stairs instead of the elevator, parking at the back of the parking lot, or setting audible reminders on your calendar, watch, or cell phone to get up and move around every 30 minutes. Your body will thank you.

Reference Articles Available Upon Request

LUNCH & LEARNS

Use, Misuse & Abuse of Opioids in Worker's Compensation Cases

Speaker: Dr. Hsiupei Chen, Carolina Pain Consultants

Date: January 17, 2013

Cost: \$10.00

Credits Pending Approval: CCM (1 hour)

Contact hours have been applied for from the American Association of Occupational Health Nurses

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