

Quit Sitting on the Job! Standing and Walking Work Stations Can Prolong Your Life

(From May 2014 newsletter)

Are you sitting on the job? Prolonged sitting has been linked to several adverse health consequences, yet many of us are stuck in an office all day. But there's good news! New research suggests that simply getting up more throughout the day can, independently of other activity, be very beneficial. Several health organizations are promoting two great ways to work without sitting: standing and walking work stations.

"I have been using a standing desk for over a year, with good results," says Gale Stafford, Manager of Analyst Resources at CITES. "I feel more alert. I also have more energy."

Gale started using a standing desk after reading articles about the health risks of prolonged sitting and desk jobs. According to the American Cancer Society, the major risks are obesity and chronic disease. Sitting all day has been shown to affect cholesterol, triglyceride and glucose levels, blood pressure, and metabolism – all biomarkers of weight gain, type II diabetes, and/or cardiovascular issues like heart attack and stroke.

Musculoskeletal health can also be improved by replacing some sitting time with standing and walking. Kim Hardin, Physical Therapist and Certified Athletic Trainer at the Activities and Recreation Center (ARC) recommends standing or walking work stations to interested patients. She says their benefits include:

- Less spinal pressure; better alignment of natural "S" curve
- Improved breathing posture for better oxygen uptake
- Ease of joint stiffness
- Ease of lower and middle back pain, neck pain, and headache

Robyn Deterding, Director of Campus Recreation, began using a standing desk partially to ease a sore knee, which worsens from sitting. Between physical

therapy and standing at her desk, “I am experiencing very little pain and no stiffness whatsoever. And I feel like I’m working on my posture and core strength while standing at the desk versus sitting (and probably slumping).”

Gale has a co-worker whose standing desk helped relieve her carpal tunnel, and another who found that standing relieves her back pain.

With knowledge of all these potential health benefits, the Department of Kinesiology and Community Health (KCH) has recently added two treadmill work stations that their faculty and staff can rent for up to an hour each day. “Being a Department with a research interest in chronic disease prevention, we want to give employees as many options as we can to make healthy choices,” says Wojtek Chodzko-Zajko, KCH Department Head and Professor. He stressed that, like any healthy behavior, using a walking work station is a personal choice, and may not be for everyone.

For those that do want to give walking or standing desks a try, many health professionals and users suggest alternating between sitting and getting up, rather than standing or walking all day. Gale has a high stool at his desk (*pictured*) that he gets up from about every hour for 5-15 minutes - totaling 1-2 hours of standing each work day. Tim Garrow, Professor in UI’s College of Agriculture, Consumer, and Environmental Sciences (ACES), likes the 50/50 approach, standing at his desk about half the day.

If you’re not fortunate enough to have your Department provide active work stations (as KCH does) there are several ways to obtain one. “I got a tall table from surplus that had the right height for a keyboard, and then elevated my monitor on a small box,” explains Tim, “Nothing fancy.”

Robyn and her IT co-worker found a desk in storage that cranks up and down. There’s a memo board attached to the monitor that Robyn can clip papers to for easy reference. They also plan on adding a standing pad, which will ease some joint tension that may occur from prolonged standing.

If your Department is flexible, or you do some work at home or a studio, [here’s an idea for under \\$30](#).

And here are some other options:

CAMPUS WELLBEING SERVICES

humanresources.illinois.edu/campus-wellbeing-services

- [Steelcase height-adjustable desks](#)

Unable or uninterested in using a standing or walking desk at all? There are several other ways to reduce sitting. Kim's favorite tip is to set a timer to go off every 30 minutes, and then get up for one minute (to stretch and/or walk around a bit). Here are other ideas:

- Stand up or pace around during phone calls
- Walk to co-workers offices to give them messages instead of emailing
- Try a walking meeting – discuss ideas while walking around the block or building
- Walk during your lunch break
- March in place or from side to side for three minutes every hour
- Use the farthest restroom in the building
- Park half a mile away

Sitting less at work is possibly the simplest way to gain multiple health benefits. It takes little effort to join the Illinois employees who are already enjoying it. Just stand up!