Sitting better than standing on the job

A recent study from the *American Journal of Epidemiology* revealed that sitting at work might not be as bad for you as was once thought. The study found that people who stand on the job are twice as likely as those who primarily sit to have a heart attack or congestive heart failure. The research study was led by the Canada-based Institute for Work & Health (IWH).

The sample included 7,320 Canadian workers who were initially free of heart disease and worked at least 15 hours per week. Within the group, 9 percent were estimated to predominantly stand, and 37 percent mostly sat. These workers were followed for 12 years from 2003 to 2015.

During the period, 3.4 percent of the study group developed heart disease. Without taking other factors into account, the risk of heart disease was higher among those whose jobs kept them mostly standing. After adjusting for personal factors like age, gender, and education; health conditions like diabetes, hypertension, and anxiety disorders; physical demands of the job; and health behaviors like smoking and drinking, the risk of heart disease was still twice as high among those who stood.

Peter Smith, PhD, concluded, "A combination of sitting, standing, and moving on the job is likely to have the greatest benefits for heart health."

Owls should place both monitors at eye level.

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Workstation ergonomics
How to properly use a computer monitor

Placing a computer monitor correctly is key to avoiding awkward body postures that lead to neck and back pain, as well as eyestrain.

How should you position the computer monitor?

Place the computer monitor so that you can easily read text displayed. Your head and torso should be upright, and your back should be supported by your chair. Position the monitor directly in front of you.

If you are working with printed materials, do not place the materials flat on a table. Instead, place the materials on a document holder that attaches to the top left or right corner of the monitor. Your documents should be close to your monitor and the same distance from your gaze. This will prevent awkward postures such as turning your head to see your screen or printed materials properly.

How do you adjust the monitor for eye level?

Place the top one-third of the computer monitor's screen at or directly below your natural gaze. Place the monitor between 18 and 24 inches from your eyes (or about one arm's length away.) If you reach out, your fingertips should be able to touch, or almost touch, the screen of your monitor.

Placing the monitor too far from you or too close to you can cause eyestrain and back and neck pain. Adjust the height of your chair, or remove or add risers under the monitor to adjust your viewing angle.

If you are a bifocal user, lower the monitor or raise the chair height so you can maintain the appropriate neck posture. Tilt the monitor up toward you if needed. Watch out for glare when adjusting the tilt of your monitor.

How much time do you spend using the monitor?

Do not stare at the computer monitor for long periods of time. This causes eye fatigue and dryness. Often, users will blink less when viewing a monitor. Every now and then, focus on objects that are far away.

Give your eye muscles a chance to relax. Look away from the screen, and blink at regular intervals to moisten your eyes. Alternate your tasks with other work duties that do not involve using the computer.

What is the proper amount of lighting to use?

Make sure you have proper lighting at your workstation. The light should be enough for you to clearly see the monitor screen and your printed materials but not so bright that there is a glare on the monitor screen. If available, use the monitor's function keys to adjust your brightness and contrast settings to reduce eyestrain.

Workstation ergonomics: Quiz

Choose the correct response to the following statements.

1. You should keep printed documents flat on a table when working at the computer. **True** or **False**
2. You should place the middle of your computer monitor's screen at or directly below eye level. **True** or **False**
3. You should place your computer monitor:

   A. About 6 inches from your face
   B. Approximately an arm's length away from you
   C. About 3 inches below your chin

4. Staring at a computer monitor's screen for long periods of time can hurt your eyes. **True** or **False**
5. If you use bifocals, you should tilt your chin up to see the screen better. **True** or **False**

Answers

1. False. When working at a computer, position printed materials so that they are at eye level with your screen. Your documents should be close to your monitor and the same distance from your gaze. **2. False.** Position your computer monitor's screen so that the top one-third of the screen is at or directly below your natural gaze. **3. B. Approximately an arm's length away from you.** Your computer monitor should be placed between 18 and 24 inches from your eyes (or about one arm's length away). Your fingertips should be able to brush your computer monitor's screen. **4. True.** Staring at your computer monitor screen for long periods of time can causes eye fatigue and dryness. Look away from your monitor now and then and blink repeatedly. **5. False.** Lower the monitor or raise your chair up so that you can clearly see the screen without hurting your neck.

Sit/stand cycle
Mix it up for maximum health

Carrie Schmitz, the senior manager of ergonomics and wellness research for Ergotron, a leading maker of sit/stand workstations, believes that movement, or postural rotation, is key to finding balance and good health.

"We live in a chair-biased society where one's status is reflected to a large extent in whether one works sitting, as in an administrative job, or standing, as assembly line laborers often do," says Schmitz. She believes this bias can be detected in phrases like "chairman of the board."

Schmitz's list of sitting risks includes back pain and disk degeneration, heart disease, type 2 diabetes, hemorrhoids, muscle degeneration, and others. She says that while the risks are not identical to smoking, the level of danger is the same. "For instance, while smoking can lead to lung cancer, a sedentary lifestyle can cause colon cancer."

Individuals are often unaware of just how much they sit. To help figure that out, Ergotron has developed a tool on is website www.juststand.org. Ergotron recommends a cycle of sitting for no more than 30 minutes, then standing for no more than 30 minutes to keep muscles activated.

According to Schmitz, modern humans have substituted many of the activities we used to do for survival with bouts of vigorous exercise. She advocates reinserting some of that activity back into the day, for example, by taking the stairs, walking to deliver a message rather than e-mailing, and taking stretch breaks.