



MSDs and prolonged sitting

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**Musculoskeletal Disorders OSH overview – Final
conference 22 October 2020**



MSD activity – static postures

- Avoiding static sitting
- Avoiding static standing
- Part of making work sustainable



Extent of the sitting problem in Europe

- **18% of workers sit more than 7.5 hours a day***
- **28% of EU workers report sitting at work almost all the time and a further 30% sitting a quarter to three quarters of the time****
- **60% of EU workplaces report sitting as a risk factor (3rd most frequently reported factor)*****
- **Women sit more than men at work**
- **Sitting work is replacing physical work and new technologies limit the need to get up**
- **Offices, call centers, drivers, assembly line workers, casinos...**

*Eurobarometer survey data physical activity 2015

**European Working Conditions Survey 2015

***ESENER survey 2019

Health effects include

- **Low back aches and pain**
 - Load on intervertebral discs
 - Load on muscles under seat bones + lack of use
 - Static muscle effort – tires muscles
- **Neck-shoulder complaints**

AND

- **Diabetes II and cardiovascular health**
- **Cancer e.g. indications of a link to breast/colon cancer**
- **Possible links to depression**
- **Premature death**
- **Triggering pain in those with rheumatic or arthritic conditions**

Move when sitting

- **Experts increasingly reject the notion of a best sitting posture to be maintained at all times**
- **Bodies are designed for movement**
- **The advantages of alternating postures and more dynamic work are clear:**
 - It prevents shortening of the thigh muscles – a known problem for habitual sitters
 - It eases the return of blood to the heart and stimulates circulation
 - It keeps intervertebral discs in a better shape
 - It can reduce vein weaknesses and varicose veins

Regulations and guidance

Employers must

- Avoid and assess risks
- Adapt work to the individual
- Plan display screen work to allow breaks/changes of activity

Guidance*

- Spend 50% or less of your work day time sitting
- Avoid long periods of sitting – get up every 20-30 minutes
 - Short, frequent micro breaks are better than longer breaks taken occasionally
- *Always* get up after 2 hours of sitting for at least 10 minutes
- *Maximum* of 5 hours total sitting in a working day

*Based on guidance from The Netherlands and Australia

Moving at work - ideas for employers

- Organise a survey or meeting with workers to discuss
- Motivate workers to take breaks, move stretch
- Introduce stretching into meetings and encourage workers to get up and move, stretch if needed during meetings
- Shorten meetings!
- Can meeting rooms, cafeterias etc have a standing area
- Provide sit-stand desks
- Provide good seating which allows posture change
- Provide fitness equipment in the restroom – Pilates ball, mat etc.
- Provide cordless phones
- Put printers, waste containers in common areas only
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Moving at work – tips for individuals

- Don't email or phone - Go to your colleague's office
- Stand up to make/take phone calls
- Keep you mobile phone out of reach
- Take the stairs – start with by getting out one floor too soon
- Can brief meetings be done standing up?
- Use breaks to move – incorporate microbreaks into how you work, to briefly stretch, get up
- Park your car away from the office entrance
- Use 'screen breaks' app, timer on your smart phone etc. as a reminder
- If you have a sit-stand desk, change posture frequently
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Dynamic sitting – fidget and move – change posture

- **Rock your pelvis back and forward**
- **Shift your weight between your buttocks**
- **Stretch your neck by pushing your head back**
- **Leaning back in seat**
- **Take micro breaks to stretch**
 - Stretch your hands, roll your shoulders, gyrate your hips
 - Stop for a deep breathe and a stretch

Some additional teleworking tips

- **Wear comfortable clothing you can move and stretch easily in**
- **Take regular breaks to get out of your chair, move around and stretch**
 - Take the rubbish out
 - Do a small household task
 - Stretch while you are waiting for the kettle to boil
 - Take a quick walk round the garden
- **If you have a cordless microphone and you can turn your camera off during a conference call, you can walk around and stretch**
- **Suggest scheduling a standing break at the start, middle and end of online meetings**
- **Treat exercise with the same priority as a work phone call and set time for it**
- **Are there different ways you could work for short periods, other than sitting at your desk the whole time?**

Driving for work

Employers

- Plan journey times to allow time for breaks and a stretch on long journeys
- Purchase vehicles with adjustable seating features
- Ensure vehicles meeting vibration reduction standards

Drivers:

- Adjust your seating
- Avoid leaning into the wheel while driving.
- Move around, change postures as much as you can while driving
- Get out of the vehicle to eat lunch, phone or do paper work

Don't substitute standing for prolonged standing

✓ **The opposite of sitting is moving**

X Prolonged standing can cause health problems and is tiring

✓ **Sit-stand desk**

✓ but workers still need breaks from both postures to move around

Workplace strategy for reducing sitting

- **Policy and practice based on risk assessment**

- Covering work organisation, work tasks and ergonomic workstations
- Combined with specific measures to reduce sitting time, promote movement and ways of working more dynamically
- Combined with a health promotion plan

To be effective this needs

- **Leadership and commitment**

- **Workplace culture that promotes active and dynamic ways of working**

- **Involvement of workers**

- procedures to raise problems and make suggestions

- **Integrated into health promotion**

Get schools moving

We tell children to sit still and not fidget ... yet we tell adults to move more!

- **Adjustable ergonomic school furniture**
- **Children - able to change posture when sitting**
- **Promote health in schools**
- **Children involved in how their school can help them be more active**
- **Health and safety risks to staff managed**

Conclusion

- **Workers should be able to adopt a variety of body positions: preferably varying between sitting, standing and moving about**

So

- **Sit when you need to, stand when you have to and move when you can***
- **When standing or sitting change posture as much as possible**

.... Because our next posture is the best posture*

*IWC, Canada

**BeUpstanding, Australia

Thank you for your attention

- **Report static sitting - pending**
- **Report static standing - pending**
- **OSHWiki articles on prolonged sitting, prolonged standing, promoting movement at work**
- https://oshwiki.eu/wiki/Musculoskeletal_disorders_and_prolonged_static_sitting
- https://oshwiki.eu/wiki/Musculoskeletal_disorders_and_prolonged_static_standing
- https://oshwiki.eu/wiki/Promoting_moving_and_exercise_at_work_to_avoid_prolonged_standing_and_sitting
- **Conversation starters for MSD workplace discussions**
<https://osha.europa.eu/en/publications/conversation-starters-workplace-discussions-about-musculoskeletal-disorders/view>
- **Napo in the workplace – MSD discussion resources Napo films**
 - Think to move / Take a break <https://www.napofilm.net/en/learning-with-napo/napo-in-the-workplace>