MSDs and prolonged sitting

Sarah Copsey,

Musculoskeletal Disorders OSH overview – Final conference 22 October 2020

Safety and health at work is everyone’s concern. It’s good for you. It’s good for business.
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
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
- ....
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
- .....
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
  XProlonged 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
- Napo in the workplace – MSD discussion resources Napo films