

Safety FOCUSED

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Sedentary Working Is a Top Health Risk

Workers can combat the negative health effects of sitting for prolonged periods.

The Importance of a Good Night's Sleep

A sufficient amount of sleep can help workers avoid lost productivity and adverse health effects.



Sedentary Working Is a Top Health Risk

Sedentary working is a new top health risk that is getting increased attention from health and safety professionals. Sitting for long periods is thought to slow the metabolism, which affects the body's ability to break down body fat and regulate blood sugar and blood pressure. However, more research is needed in order to clear up some confusion over how employers can protect their staff from the perils of sedentary working.

Although studies have linked excessive sitting with obesity, Type 2 diabetes, some types of cancer and early death, most of the evidence is based on observational studies, which have failed to show a direct connection between sitting and ill health. Furthermore, more reliable research is needed regarding workplace interventions, such as sit-to-stand desks.

While there is not yet a clear answer as to what employers should do to address sedentary employees, there are things that employees can do on their own in order to stay healthy, including the following best practices:

- Stand up for at least two hours per day.
- Set a reminder to stand up every 30 minutes.
- Stand instead of sit whenever it is practical, such as during meetings or while on the phone.
- Walk over to colleagues' desks for conversations instead of emailing or phoning them.
- Use the stairs instead of the elevator as often as possible.

Although sit-to-stand desks can reduce sitting time by 30 minutes to two hours a day, their effect on employees' health is still unclear.

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The Importance of a Good Night's Sleep

A poor night's sleep may not only affect your productivity at work—it can also have adverse health effects.

Although the average recommended amount of sleep is between seven and nine hours per night, the average employee gets six hours and 28 minutes of sleep, according to a recent study of 1,060 participants. Two of the top reported side effects of sleep loss were a lack of attention and taking longer to complete tasks. Both suggest that sleep loss may negatively affect productivity.

The effects of a lack of sleep, such as feeling irritable and not working at your best, are well known, but they also include profound physical health consequences. Regular poor sleep is linked to an increased risk of obesity, heart disease, diabetes and a shortened life expectancy.

Getting enough sleep is especially important during the cold winter months, when a lack of sunlight can make people feel more fatigued and sluggish.

With that in mind, the following tips can help ensure a good night's sleep:

- **Establish a regular bedtime routine.** Doing so will help program your body to sleep better. Go to bed at the same time every night, and create a habit of winding down beforehand by doing activities such as reading a book or taking a bath.
- **Create a restful sleeping environment.** TVs and other electronic gadgets can interfere with your ability to wind down.
- **Don't overindulge before bedtime.** Too much food or alcohol before bedtime can interfere with sleep patterns. While alcohol may help you fall asleep, it can interrupt your sleep later in the night.



WHAT SKILLS ARE AFFECTED BY LACK OF SLEEP?



Producing innovative solutions to problems



Displaying emotional intelligence (empathetic, self-awareness, self-confidence)



Assessing risk and anticipating consequences



Comprehending and communicating in rapidly changing environments



Multitasking and decision-making