



Healthy
Workplaces
LIGHTEN THE LOAD



Get moving at work

Key points

- As many jobs become more sedentary, there is mounting evidence linking ill health to a sedentary lifestyle.
- Our bodies need movement – avoiding static postures is part of making work sustainable.
- Simply standing instead of sitting is not the solution, as prolonged standing can also pose health risks.
- It is important to change posture as much as possible – workers should be able to adopt a variety of positions when working, preferably being able to vary between sitting, standing and moving around.
- The best way of sitting is 'dynamic sitting', where sitting postures are continuously altered.
- By working together, employers and workers can find practical ways to promote more active ways of working¹.
- Our next posture is the best posture!

All info sheets and other campaign materials are available to download from EU-OSHA's Healthy Workplaces Campaign website (<https://healthy-workplaces.eu>).

¹) The good practice examples in this info sheet are not necessarily mandatory or relevant to all workplaces.

Healthy Workplaces Lighten the Load

The European Agency for Safety and Health at Work (EU-OSHA) is running a Europe-wide campaign from 2020 to 2022 to raise awareness of work-related musculoskeletal disorders (MSDs) and the importance of preventing them. The objective is to encourage employers, workers and other stakeholders to work together to prevent MSDs and to promote good musculoskeletal health among EU workers.

Why we need to sit less and move more

Sedentary behaviour is increasing both at work and outside work, and there is mounting evidence for the ill health effects of sedentary lifestyles. Health risks include diabetes and heart and vascular diseases, as well as musculoskeletal problems. Sedentary lifestyles have also been linked to depression and some cancers. The health effects occur because our bodies need movement to get our blood pumping and oxygen circulating around our bodies. Maintaining the same posture places higher loads on the muscles and tendons than changing postures. Anyone with a chronic musculoskeletal condition should not sit for too long and avoiding static postures is part of making work sustainable.

When sitting, an upright posture places less strain on the spinal discs, but it is not good to maintain this posture for an extended period. 'Dynamic sitting', where sitting postures are continuously altered, is preferable.

Being more active while working may also improve job performance and enhance job satisfaction. This is why our next posture is the best posture.



Apart from office work, prolonged sitting can be a feature of cashier work and work at service desks, in call centres, on production lines, in laboratories and control rooms, and while driving.

Regulations and recommendations

While prolonged sitting is not specifically covered by any European safety and health regulations, employers have general duties to assess risks and adapt work to the individual. Regulations on display screen equipment work require periodic breaks or changes of activity to reduce time spent on display screen work.

Recommendations on sitting at work can be summarised as follows¹:

- Do not exceed 5 hours of sitting at work each day.
- Take microbreaks at least every 20-30 minutes.
- Always get up for at least 10 minutes after 2 hours of sitting.
- Work in an active manner and alternate between sitting, standing and walking.

Action in the workplace

We need to sit dynamically, take frequent breaks, and stretch and move. The best way to do this is by making sitting a smaller part and moving a bigger part of workplace routine. Simply standing instead of sitting is not the solution, as prolonged standing can also pose health risks. Simple measures to create a more dynamic workplace can be taken, depending on the workplace and risk assessment. Actions should be part of preventing risks, providing good ergonomics and promoting well-being.

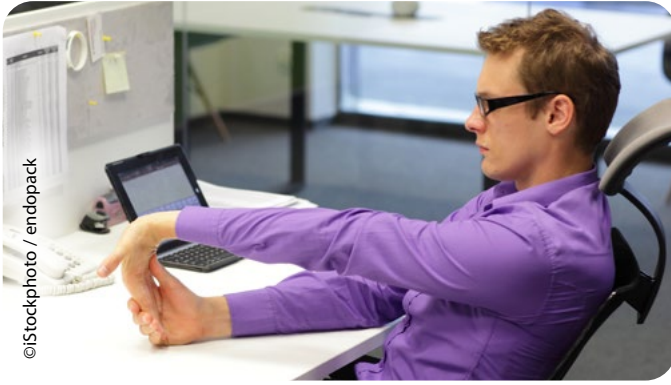
1) https://oshwiki.eu/wiki/Musculoskeletal_disorders_and_prolonged_static_sitting

What can employers consider doing?

- Make it possible for workers to alternate between sitting, standing and moving around; motivate workers to take breaks, move and stretch.
- Set maximum sitting times and times for stretching and moving.
- Introduce stretching into meetings and encourage workers to get up and move, and stretch if needed, during meetings.
- Consider whether meeting rooms and cafeterias could have a standing area.
- Provide sit-stand desks.
- Provide good seating that allows posture change.
- Put some simple equipment in the restroom – Pilates ball, mat, etc.
- Provide cordless phones so that workers can walk and talk.
- Remove printers from individual offices and move bins to a central location.
- Provide computer apps that give break and stretching reminders.

What can workers do to be more active?

- Go to a colleague's desk instead of emailing or phoning; stand up or walk for short meetings.
- Keep your mobile phone out of reach and stand up for calls.
- Take the stairs – start by getting out of the lift one floor early.
- Incorporate microbreaks into how you work, to briefly stretch and get up.
- Park your car a distance from the office entrance.
- Use a 'screen breaks' or 'timer' app on your mobile as a reminder.
- If you have a sit-stand desk, change posture frequently.
- Drink water – it enhances blood flow and means you will walk to the toilet more.
- Take a short lunchtime walk.



Dynamic sitting

You can vary your sitting posture in the following ways:

- by leaning forwards, leaning backwards and leaning sideways;
- by tilting the pelvis forward with back support, and tilting the pelvis backward without back support;
- by shifting your weight sometimes more on to the right and sometimes more to the left buttock;
- by using the dynamic chair 'back' setting if you have one;
- when sitting forward, by supporting yourself on the desk;
- by taking frequent microbreaks from intensive computer work to stretch your hands, wrists and fingers;
- by rolling your shoulders and rotating your neck;
- by standing up, stretching and moving for 20-30 seconds around every 30 minutes, particularly if you feel any tension in your neck, wrist, shoulders or back;
- by doing gentle exercises every 2 hours;
- by taking a break to breathe in deeply and out slowly a couple of times – this is relaxing and good for the spine.

Simple stretches to do at your workstation

- Lift your arms above your head and do arm circles.
- Shrug your shoulders and roll them backwards and forwards a few times.
- Roll your neck gently from left to right, focusing on tight spots.
- Roll your ankles, point your toes and flex your feet.
- Stretch your hip flexors by pointing one knee at the floor and pushing the hips forward.
- Lean back in your chair and push your upper arms back onto the chair to stretch the chest and shoulders.
- Clasp your hands behind your chair and stretch your shoulders backwards.

Driving tips

While it may be harder for drivers to stand up during the working day, advice includes the following:

- Adjust your seating.
- Watch your posture as you drive and avoid leaning into the wheel. Move around and change posture while seated.
- Take regular breaks to move around and do back stretches.
- Always get out of your vehicle to phone, text, take breaks, eat, etc.

Making changes

Actions intended to change sedentary behaviour are likely to fail unless agreed on through discussion and with the participation of workers. Every workplace is different and imposing rigid procedures will only cause resentment. Workers still need flexibility and control over how they work. Some may worry that pausing to stretch will make them less productive. Discussions can take place through meetings and surveys, where workers can also propose ideas. Managers need to show commitment and lead the way.



Examples of discussion questions:

- How can the way tasks are planned and carried out in your workplace be changed to combine sitting and standing options as much as possible? How could short periods of exercise be built into the working day?
- How could your workplace support you to be more active? What steps can management take to promote more moving and 'dynamic sitting' in the office?
- What steps can individuals take? List two things that you already do and two new things that you will do

Workplace example 1

A software company ran a programme to raise awareness of the risk of occupational inactivity and foster a healthy workplace culture through strong leadership. Measures taken included providing information, encouraging workers to move frequently throughout the day, ergonomic improvements such as height-adjustable desks and taller tables for standing meetings, and workshops. Workers were given biofeedback trackers and posters prompted them to take action, such as taking the stairs instead of the lift. They were offered personal health counselling services, and advice on avoiding sedentary work was built into the return-to-work programme. 'Health challenge' activities with small incentives were organised.

Source: <https://osha.europa.eu/en/publications/healthy-workplaces-good-practice-awards-2016-2017-0/view>

Workplace example 2

An orchid propagation factory introduced some group stretching during work breaks. A 5-minute exercise programme takes place at the work stations immediately before scheduled morning and afternoon breaks. Workers leading the stretching have been trained by a physiotherapist.



Napo film clips and resources for workplace discussions

- Keep moving:
<https://www.napofilm.net/en/learning-with-napo/napo-in-the-workplace/keep-moving-work>
- Take a break:
<https://www.napofilm.net/en/learning-with-napo/napo-in-the-workplace/take-break>

EU-OSHA resources

- OSHwiki article 'Musculoskeletal disorders and prolonged static sitting':
https://oshwiki.eu/wiki/Musculoskeletal_disorders_and_prolonged_static_sitting
- OSHwiki article 'Promoting moving and exercise at work to avoid prolonged standing and sitting':
https://oshwiki.eu/wiki/Promoting_moving_and_exercise_at_work_to_avoid_prolonged_standing_and_sitting
- EU-OSHA's thematic section on preventing and managing MSDs:
<https://osha.europa.eu/en/themes/musculoskeletal-disorders>
- Research on MSDs:
<https://osha.europa.eu/en/research-work-related-msds> (where reports on avoiding static work are available).

Useful sources of advice and further information

- BeUpstanding:
<https://beupstanding.com.au/>
- Up and Down – Up and Down (in English and German):
https://www.baua.de/DE/Angebote/Publikationen/Praxis/A65.html?__blob=publicationFile&v=9
- Physical activity at the workplace:
<https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/9fc2b8a0-e537-11e7-9749-01aa75ed71a1/language-en/format-PDF/source-56006094>

