

Standing Workstations – are you using them correctly?

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We all know sitting for long periods of time is bad for you, but what about standing still?

“Those who work standing are liable to varicose veins ... [because] the strain on the muscles is such that the circulation of the blood is retarded. Standing even for a short time proves exhausting compared with walking and running though it be for a long time ... Nature delights and is restored by alternating and varied actions. “

Bernardino Ramazzini : De Morbis Artificum Diatriba (1700)

Whilst sitting has been described as the ‘new smoking’ in the popular press it is worth taking a step back and considering the risk associated with the alternative. It wasn’t that long ago that the ‘anti-sitting’ movement (*no pun intended*) saw the popularity of the exercise ball as an office chair. Of course in retrospect we realise now it was probably one of the dumbest things invented!! Surprise, surprise, making a person sit on an unstable surface for 8 hours a day lead to more injuries and more accidents. Thankfully exercise balls in the office have been banished to the realms of history along with flared trousers and mullet haircuts.

Prolonged sitting (sitting for 8 or more hours a day) has been linked to an increased risk of cancer, cardiovascular disease, musculoskeletal symptoms and death.^{1,2} Prolonged standing (standing for 8 or more hours a day) has been linked to musculoskeletal pain of the lower back and feet,³ Chronic venous insufficiency (Varicose veins),^{4,5} Preterm birth, and spontaneous abortions,⁵ and Orthostatic Hypotension. Note it is the ‘*Prolonged*’ bit that seems the common theme. The problem is that we get so involved in our work we forget to change our posture, so standing is just as bad as sitting in this situation.

So if you have a standing workstation, live life on the edge and change it to a seated workstation regularly. Even Bernardino Ramazzini identified the dangers associated with prolonged standing in his seminal work on the diseases of workers in 1700. Let’s not make the same mistakes.

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