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Q standing desks

# Standing desks: don't stand for too long too quickly

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Switching to standing desks reduces musculoskeletal stress, but workers must increase their standing time gradually to avoid the risk of injury, an occupational physiotherapist warns.

According to Jordan Lees, who specialises in workplace ergonomics and owns UpDown Desk, employers providing height-adjustable and standing desks need to ensure workers use them properly and incrementally build-up their standing time to a total of three to four hours per day.

Lees told *OHS Alert* that for desk-bound workers, holding a prolonged posture rather than sitting itself creates health problems.

He says a prolonged posture causes stress to accumulate in the same part of the body over time, to the point where it can't repair or recover and leads to back, neck and shoulder pain, and headaches.

Research also shows prolonged sitting and a sedentary lifestyle can cause more serious health issues like cardiovascular disease, diabetes and obesity, he says.

Standing desks "provide a way for employees to switch between sitting and standing, which eliminates that accumulation of stress and puts a halt to it from a musculoskeletal perspective", Lees says.

However, he warns they can be harmful if not used properly, and employers can put workers at risk by not seeking advice before implementing them.

He says not all people are suited to standing desks, and employers should ensure employees are in the right physical condition to use one.

Further, failing to set the desk to the right height can be damaging – causing neck and shoulder problems if set too low, for example – and standing for too long too quickly can place new stresses on the body, Lees says.

Sitting all day causes postural muscles to decondition, he notes. Placing new, albeit small, stresses on a sedentary worker's body can lead to injury, especially in older or incapacitated workers, he says.

## Start with five-minute standing periods

Lees stresses that workers don't need to stand all day to reap the benefits of a standing desk, and there is no one-size-fits-all approach to usage.

He says workers shouldn't spend more than half of their working day standing, and their total standing time per day should be accumulated in small bouts.

"Switching back and forward between sitting and standing is preferable to sitting or standing for three hours at a time," Lees says.

He says a "conservative" way to ease into using a standing desk is to stand for five to 10 minutes every hour.

"Over the course of a six-week period you might move up to 30 minutes every hour, or 15 minutes every 30 minutes – whichever way feels better for your body," he recommends.

According to Lees, the high cost of many standing desks is one of the main barriers to his clients acquiring them, and he has embarked on a "stand for your health" campaign to make them more affordable.

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