

# Improve worker health by encouraging movement

Too much sitting during the work day has been associated with a host of medical problems that employees can't avoid even if they adhere to physical fitness guidelines.

Chronic diseases, such as heart disease, cancer, and diabetes, have been linked to prolonged sitting. In addition, studies have shown that sedentary work can result in back and shoulder pain and obesity, and as well as a higher risk of premature death.

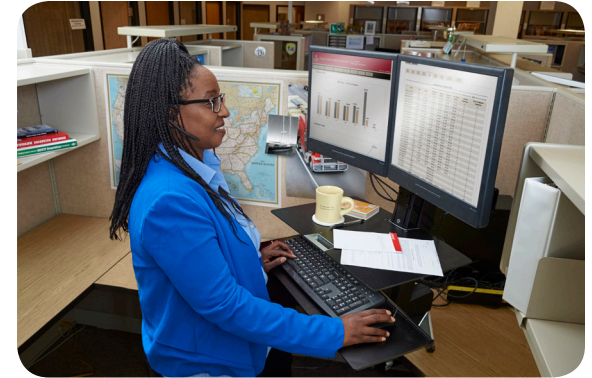
These risks persist even if a worker gets the recommended 150 minutes of cardiovascular activity each week.

To help workers improve their health, the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH) encourages employers to take an integrated approach to reduce health risks from sedentary work. The following Total Worker Health steps are recommended to reduce employee health risks from sedentary work:

- Include senior management support and worker participation in all health initiatives.
- Involve workers and labor representatives in designing and implementing procedures and practices to reduce sedentary work and promote physical activity.
- Ensure that any program striving to advance worker well-being has the commitment of organizational leadership.
- Evaluate existing resources and current policies, programs, and practices to assess what works to promote physical activity and what the future needs are.
- Offer workers more job autonomy, control over schedules and workloads, and control over the workstation and its setup so that they can take physical activity breaks after periods of sitting, or take rest breaks after prolonged standing or heavy labor.
- Educate management and supervisors on ways to reduce the job stress faced by workers, such as reducing demands or supporting rest and physical activity breaks.
- Link existing worker safety and health programs to related programs such as employee assistance programs or related training efforts.
- Offer organizational and social support to encourage physical activity such as walking



Your Health and Wellness Awareness Program



## ***To help workers move more***

- Allow for several short breaks throughout the day during which workers can engage in intense activity such as fast walking or stair climbing, or moderate mobility.
- Design workstations to allow for mobility and posture change.
- Provide sit-stand workstations that allow workers to easily shift between seated and standing work tasks as best suits their needs.
- If sit-stand workstations or treadmill desks are adopted, ensure that workers are trained in their use in order to maximize their effectiveness and to prevent muscular discomfort or eye strain.

or biking to work or during breaks.

- Be aware of how the built environment can influence a worker's level of physical activity, and where possible, provide input into constructing a built environment that encourages activity (e.g., a work station that allows for movement, safe trails around the workplace, or fitness facilities onsite or nearby).
- Include health education (information dissemination and awareness) about the effects of sedentary work and prolonged postures (in combination with the policies, programs, and practices that allow workers to reduce their sedentary time at work).
- Evaluate the program and make adjustments as needed.

NIOSH also reminds employers that they must ensure privacy and adhere to regulatory requirements such as the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA), Affordable Care Act (ACA), and applicable state laws. Workers should understand that they are protected from discrimination, adverse changes to health insurance status or costs, and confidentiality breaches. Privacy training for supervisors and managers is recommended.

In addition, employers should remember that employee participation in any intervention is voluntary. Avoid coercive incentives or disincentives.

### ***What can workers do?***

To reduce the negative health impacts of a sedentary job, employees can:

- Stand or move around every 30 minutes (or as needed).
- Stand while talking on the phone.
- Hold walking meetings.
- Park farther away from the worksite to increase walking time.
- Take the stairs instead of the elevator.

## Is your work life sedentary? You're not alone. Did you know ...

**8 million**

people work in retail & sales  
many of these jobs are stationary or sedentary

**5 million**  
management &  
professional  
workers have  
sedentary jobs



**21 million**  
office &  
administrative  
workers have  
sedentary jobs

## Worldwide the number of sedentary workers is increasing each year.

*Source: National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH)*