

Guidance for Consideration of Requests for Sit/Stand Workstations

Environmental and Occupational Health Support Services (EOHSS)

Introduction

The need for office ergonomics is an important aspect of creating positive and healthy work environment especially given the predominance of sedentary jobs. Research suggests that long periods of sedentary behaviour have adverse effects on health. Consequently sit/stand workstations are growing in popularity as people are exploring options to prevent health issues attributed to lack of mobility and being sedentary for extended periods of time.

Sit/Stand Workstations

In a well designed workspace, the employee has the ability to choose from a variety of well-balanced working positions to avoid muscle pain and strain. Sit/stand workstations allow employees to alternate between sitting and standing to reduce long periods of sedentary postures. It is important to note that little evidence is currently available to determine the benefits of a sit/stand workstation versus other strategies to increase mobility (Workplace Interventions for Reducing Sitting at Work, McMaster Optimal Aging Portal).

Benefits of Standing

- Combats sedentary lifestyle.
- Standing reduces strain on lower back.
- Individuals burn more calories while standing (20% increase).
- Improved attention span.

There are a number of additional health risks associated with sedentary behaviour (Moving Ahead - Workplace Interventions to Reduce Physical Inactivity and Sedentary Behaviour, The Conference Board of Canada).

Disadvantages of Standing

- Increased pressure on hips, knees and feet.
- Health risks (i.e. varicose veins, back or joint pain).
- Some tasks are better performed when sitting down (i.e. fine motor tasks).
- Individuals may tire quickly while standing.

Considerations for a Sit/Stand Workstation

The considerations for a sit/stand workstation may be separated into two categories, prevention/wellness and accommodation due to disability.

1) Prevention/Wellness

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Supervisors may wish to consider a sit/stand workstation for an employee if one or more of the following applies:

- Works on computer and/or performs sedentary work for majority of day.
- Required to remain at workstation for extended periods (i.e. 2+ consecutive hours).
- Multiple users share single workstation.

2) Accommodation

Under the Ontario Human Rights Code, employers are required to provide reasonable workplace accommodation, to the point of "undue hardship", to individuals and groups where the requirement for accommodation arises out of one or more of the protected grounds of discrimination, such as creed, disability, race, ethnic origin, marital status, or family status, among others.

Workplace accommodation may involve a service, adaptation or adjustment in the work environment that enable individuals to compete for jobs and perform employment activities without discrimination on a prohibited ground. It can include, but is not limited to, recruitment, selection, employment and separation processes, including training and career development. It may be short or long-term, with the goal of enabling individuals to compete for jobs and perform the essential duties of their employment.

Workplace accommodation is based on individual circumstances and can include, but is not limited to, technical aids, job redesign, and modifications to workstations, work scheduling, evaluation timelines, and employment policies and practices.

The process of identifying an appropriate workplace accommodation is consultative involving the University, the individual, the union/employee representative, and other parties as needed, such as the employee's physician, the University Occupational Health Consultant and Occupational Health Nurse, and third party medical consultants.

For additional information, refer to Policies, Procedures and Guidelines for Workplace Accommodation, available at <http://www.workingatmcmaster.ca/med/document/WorkplaceAccommodationPolicy-2015-1-48.pdf>.

Contact your Employee Health Services (EHS) Consultant for support and information about accommodation due to disability. The EHS contact page is available at <http://www.workingatmcmaster.ca/ehs/contacts/>.

Cost

Departments are responsible for the cost associated with a sit/stand workstation and any additional/supplementary equipment. Upon request, Environmental and Occupational Health Support Services (EOHSS) will perform workstation ergonomic assessments and assist with recommending various sit/stand workstation designs as warranted.

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Using a Sit/Stand Workstation

Proper use of a sit/stand workstation requires regularly alternating between sitting and standing, or as recommended by a treating health professional. Neutral body position should be continuously maintained when sitting and standing. When the workstation is in the standing position, be sure that:

- Platform is at such a height that your head and arms are in the same position as if you were sitting at a computer workstation (head straight and arms at 90° angle),
- Anti-fatigue mat is used if space is appropriate,
- Supportive shoes are worn, and
- Footrest is available to shift weight as needed.

Alternatives to Sit/Stand Workstations

A sit/stand workstation is one strategy that may be implemented to increase activity levels and improve health. Other activities include:

- Stand and take a scheduled break (every 30 minutes). Add standing agenda item to meeting.
- Schedule walking meetings.
- Walk during lunch break.
- Stand while taking on phone.
- Walk to colleague's office instead of emailing or calling.
- Stand to greet visitors
- Active commuting
- Stand at back of room during long presentations
- Rotate job tasks
- Perform stretches at workstation
- Set reminder in calendaring system each hour to stretch/walk/stand

When a sit/stand workstation is not implemented, supervisors should encourage employees to participate in the above noted alternatives.

Resources

McMaster Optimal Aging Portal (Workplace Interventions for Reducing Sitting at Work)
<https://www.mcmasteroptimalaging.org/full-article/a7fe6a923be80fe100b3a7981a88dd47>

The Conference Board of Canada (Moving Ahead. Workplace Interventions to Reduce Physical Inactivity and Sedentary Behaviour)
[file:///C:/Users/awest/Downloads/CBOC_movingaheadworkplacebehaviour%20\(3\).PDF](file:///C:/Users/awest/Downloads/CBOC_movingaheadworkplacebehaviour%20(3).PDF)

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Canadian Centre for Occupational Health and Safety (Sit/Stand Desk)

https://www.ccohs.ca/oshanswers/ergonomics/office/sit_stand_desk.htm

Canadian Centre for Occupational Health and Safety (Working in a Standing Position - Basic Information)

http://www.ccohs.ca/oshanswers/ergonomics/standing/standing_basic.html

Environmental and Occupational Health Support Services (Ergonomics Self Assessment Checklist)

<http://www.workingatmcmaster.ca/med/document/Ergonomics-Self-Assessment-Checklist-1-36.pdf>