



A GUIDE TO SITTING LESS & **MOVING MORE** FOR OFFICE WORKPLACES

SIT LESS. MOVE MORE. FEEL GOOD

What Is This About?

These guidelines explain how office workplaces can encourage staff to sit less and move more to improve their health. They will assist in creating an office environment and culture that encourages staff to take opportunities to sit less and move more.

Why Should I Care?

A workplace that supports staff to sit less and move more can benefit from more productive staff and reduced absenteeism (Healy et al, 2012). Most employees spend at least eight hours each day at work, so the work environment and culture can significantly influence an employee's health. There are a number of low or no-cost ways to encourage staff to sit less and move more, making this a very cost-effective workplace wellbeing focus.

Who Is This For?

These guidelines are for anyone responsible for wellbeing at work to gain the support of management and staff. Office workers are the focus for these guidelines, as they make up a large proportion of the 'sitting' workforce. However, other workplace environments with staff who sit for long periods of time may also find these useful.

Background

The modern office environment has a heavy reliance on technology and sitting has become the default for many office tasks, including sitting at computers, sitting to answer the phone, sitting during meetings, and even sitting during lunch breaks. It's very easy to sit too much and this 'sitting culture' puts employees at risk of poor health.

The health benefits of sitting less and moving more for health include:

- reduced risk of chronic diseases such as cardiovascular disease, type 2 diabetes and cancer
- improved weight management
- improved mental wellbeing and reduced stress
- reduced risk of musculoskeletal disorders and injuries (Schofield, Quigley & Brown, 2009)

The benefits for an organisation with staff who sit less and move more can include:

- improved staff productivity
- reduced absenteeism
- greater staff retention (Healy et al, 2012).

The new Australian physical activity guidelines for adults recommend minimising the amount of time spent in prolonged sitting and breaking up long periods of sitting as often as possible (Brown, Bauman, Bull, & Burton, 2012). However, this does not mean standing all day long. Everyone – even people who are already physically active and those who currently do no activity – will benefit from sitting less and moving more.

Encouraging staff to sit less and move more should be considered as part of a wider workplace wellness programme that encourages staff to improve their overall health. Creating opportunities for staff to be more active includes making small changes that easily become part of the daily routine or normal culture in your workplace. This benefits the entire workplace through improved productivity, performance, efficiency and staff morale.

The health benefits of less sitting time should be seen as additional, not as an alternative to, participation in regular physical activity. This is why these guidelines focus on encouraging staff to both sit less and move more.



Steps

For Introducing A Programme To Sit Less And Move More

Step 1:

Identify key personnel

Identify personnel in the workplace who can support the programme. To increase buy-in and ensure actions are relevant, include staff from different departments throughout the workplace, as well as management. Select staff who can be champions; they will need to actively promote and role model sitting less.

Step 2:

Develop a plan for your workplace

Organise a meeting to brainstorm ideas for changes your organisation could make to encourage staff to sit less and move more. To help you get started, there is a list of low or no-cost ideas in *Appendix 1*. Choose a variety of environmental, organisational and individual ideas to increase the likelihood of success. Remember to involve senior management in developing the plan and get them to commit to role modelling the agreed changes. Once you have a list of ideas, prioritise these (eg, by level of ease to implement) then introduce the changes slowly. For example, you could encourage standing during meetings as a first step.

Step 3:

Educate staff

Many people do not know that too much sitting is bad for their health. As part of your plan, inform staff about the health risks of too much sitting and the benefits of moving more while at work.

Step 4:

Implement the programme

Make sure the programme is regularly promoted and highly visible to staff throughout the workplace. Consider starting the programme with a launch or celebration and linking this with the start of spring, summer or the New Year, to engage as many staff as possible.

Step 5:

Communicate regularly with staff

Schedule regular communications to remind staff about the programme, what they can do to sit less and move more, and the benefits they will get. Frame these ideas as opportunities, rather than an inconvenience or a rule. Regularly communicate with staff using different methods such as intranet, staff notice boards, and emails from senior management. Consider two-way communication, such as setting up an email address for feedback to be sent.

Step 6:

Evaluate and celebrate success

Once your programme is part of your workplace, celebrate success with staff. Use a range of communication channels to highlight positive changes in the workplace.



Appendix 1:

Practical Ideas To Get You Started

Below is a selection of low or no-cost ideas for encouraging staff to sit less and move more in the workplace. The ideas have been divided into those that target the organisation, the workplace environment, and individual employees. Select the ones that will work best for your workplace and budget.

What can my organisation do to encourage less sitting and more movement?

Role modelling

Introduce a standing culture across your organisation. People will feel more comfortable standing if others are doing the same. Managers and senior staff should be encouraged to initiate and role model standing as much as possible. How can this be done?

- Hold stand up management meetings.
- Managers take the lead in standing at staff meetings so others feel comfortable to do so.

Change the sitting meeting culture

Standing meetings are often shorter and more productive. Meetings provide a good opportunity to start to change the 'sitting culture'. How can this be done?

- Promote a culture that is standing-friendly by announcing at the beginning of meetings that attendees are welcome and encouraged to stand.
- Schedule stand up or activity breaks in meetings.
- Put 'Standing meetings welcome' signs in meeting rooms.
- Update meeting agenda templates to include at least one agenda item during which everyone stands.
- Move chairs out of meeting rooms or stack them at one end.
- For meetings conducted via videoconference, set the default camera position at standing height.
- Encourage walking meetings. These work best for small, informal meetings with two or three people.

Review and update relevant workplace practices

Sitting less and moving more can be incorporated into relevant workplace practices and become part of the office culture. Examples could include the following:

- Encourage staff to walk over and talk to colleagues, rather than emailing.
- Encourage staff to take a break each day so they have a chance to walk or do something active, for example between 12pm and 1pm.
- Support staff who want alternatives to chairs (such as swiss balls).
- Activate or install a computer programme that prompts staff to take micro-breaks and stand regularly.

Offer organisational extras

- Organise staff challenges such as walking, pedometer or stair challenges.
- Establish a 'walk or cycle to work' day each month.
- Set up workplace sports teams.
- Set up a lunchtime walking or jogging group.
- Sponsor entry in fun-runs or other events for staff.
- Offer telephone headsets to those staff who want to stand or walk while on the phone.

Regular and ongoing communication and education

- Set up daily prompts for staff, such as 'Test our stairs today', and 'Answer your phone standing up'.
- Tell staff about the health benefits of sitting less and moving more.
- Remind staff to stand by using prompts on screen savers, posters, intranet and email reminders.
- Encourage the use of active transport (walking, running, cycling, or scooting) to and from work.
- Set up a hub or discussion board for staff to share stories and ideas.
- Set up an information station with local maps, public transport timetables, walking and cycling path information, and routes of short walks near your workplace.



How can our office environment be changed to encourage less sitting and more movement?

- Provide a stand up reading area. Existing office furniture such as filing cabinets or bookshelves can work well.
- Consider replacing existing tables and chairs in one meeting room with a higher table that staff can stand at.
- Centralise printers or office rubbish bins so staff have to get up to use them.
- Provide prompts such as signs near the lifts encouraging stair use.
- Encourage staff to use active transport by providing lockers, secure bike storage, drying facilities for wet weather clothing and adequate changing/shower facilities, if possible.

Note: For those interested in sit/stand work stations or desks, there are a number of options available and these will vary in price. There may be existing office furniture that can be converted to a standing work station as a cost effective solution. Please see the [guidelines for using computers](#) for more information on preventing and managing discomfort, pain and injury, including ergonomic assessments.



What can individuals do to move more and sit less?

- Walk over and talk to colleagues, rather than calling or emailing them.
- Use the stairs instead of the lift.
- Walk to offsite meetings where possible.
- Go outside and get some fresh air every day.
- Choose active transport – walk, cycle, scoot all or part of the way to and from work.
- Substitute some daily sitting desk time with walking or standing.
- Use a desk timer or computer software to monitor sitting time and act as a reminder to stand more.
- Set up individual reminders/prompts such as to stand up every time the phone rings.
- Set and self-monitor goals to sit less and move more.
- Schedule activity breaks into your daily calendar.
- Keep a pair of comfortable flat shoes at work for standing or being active.

Need More Support?

If you would like to develop other components of a workplace wellness programme, the following resources may be useful:

Health Promotion Agency, Providing healthier beverage options in your workplace (2013):

<http://www.hpa.org.nz/sites/default/files/documents/Healthier%20beverages%20doc-Final.pdf>

Health and Productivity Institute of New Zealand (HAPINZ), Best Practice Guidelines (2013):

<http://www.hapinz.co.nz/guidelines.html>

Ministry of Health, Guidance on Nutrition and Physical Activity for workplaces (2013):

<http://www.health.govt.nz/your-health/healthy-living/food-and-physical-activity/guidance-nutrition-and-physical-activity-workplaces>

Ministry of Health, New Zealand physical activity guidelines:

<http://www.health.govt.nz/our-work/preventative-health-wellness/physical-activity>

Ministry of Health, Physical activity guides:

<http://www.health.govt.nz/your-health/healthy-living/food-and-physical-activity/physical-activity/activity-guides>

New Zealand Transport Agency (NZTA), Bikewise:

<http://www.bikewise.co.nz/>

Wellington Regional Council, Waikato Regional Council, Auckland Council, The costs of physical inactivity (2013):

<http://www.gw.govt.nz/assets/About-GW-the-region/News-and-media-releases/Physical-inactivity-costs-report.pdf>

Workwell:

http://www.workwell.health.nz/workwell_home

Auckland Regional Public Health Service Heartbeat Challenge:

<http://www.workplacehealth.co.nz/index.cfm?PageID=53>

The Heart Foundation:

<http://www.heartfoundation.org.nz/programmes-resources/food-industry-and-hospitality/Hospitality-Hub/specific-food-service-sectors/workplace-cafeteria/workplace-food-and-nutrition-policy>

ACC and Department of Labour, Guidelines for using computers:

http://www.acc.co.nz/PRD_EXT_CSMP/idcplg?IdcService=GET_FILE&dID=58496&dDocName=WPC090196&allowInterrupt=1

ACC, Injury prevention at work:

<http://www.acc.co.nz/preventing-injuries/at-work/index.htm>

ACC worksmart tips:

<http://www.worksmarttips.co.nz/>

ACC Habit at work:

<http://www.habitatwork.co.nz/>



References

Brown, W., Bauman, A., Bull, F., & Burton, N. (2012). *Development of evidence-based physical activity recommendations for adults (18-64 years)*. Report prepared for the Australian Government Department of Health.

Healy, G., Lawler, S., Thorp, A., Neuhaus, M., Robson, E., Owen, N. & Dunstan, D. (2012). *Reducing prolonged sitting in the workplace: An evidence review: full report*. Carlton, Vic.: Victorian Health Promotion Foundation (VicHealth).

Schofield, G., Quigley, R., & Brown, R. (2009). *Does sedentary behaviour contribute to chronic disease or chronic disease risk in adults?* Wellington: Agencies for Nutrition Action.

Free Resources Available

These guidelines are produced by the Health Promotion Agency (HPA), Wellington and are available from www.hpa.org.nz/nutrition-physical-activity-resources. For more information, contact the Nutrition and Physical Activity Team at HPA – phone 04 917 0060.

Other free resources (posters, Q&A sheet, key messages, stair challenge charts) to support these guidelines are shown on the next page and can also be ordered from www.hpa.org.nz/nutrition-physical-activity-resources.

