



Be a Stand-Up Guy at Work

Some days, I spend a lot of time at my desk. In fact, if I'm not meeting with a client or prospect or filling up my water bottle, some days I forget to get out of my chair for hours on end. It comes as no surprise, then, that when I attend a trade show as an exhibitor (which requires a good deal more standing than my day-to-day work life), I can feel it. At no other time do I feel more out of shape than at the end of an 8-hour conference when I've been on my feet all day. I'm just not conditioned to handle it.

What about your employees? Are they conditioned and positioned to handle long days on their feet? Have you educated them and provided them with the tools they need to decrease fatigue, increase comfort, and generally make sure they are safe and productive while on their feet? I was reminded of the simplicity (yet sometimes blatantly ignored) components of creating a good standing work environment when I read the article below in the CCOHS October newsletter. It's worth a look:

“Working Safely In a Stand-Up Job”

Does your work require you to stand, planted in one position for hours on end? Any prolonged position can hurt your body, and standing is no exception. There is no single, ideal body position for working. The best position is a variety of positions, where you equally distribute loads on different parts of the body but causes no physical strain. The reality in many workplaces, however, is that workers often sit or stand for long periods of time.

Anyone whose job requires them to stand on their feet for hours on end (salesperson, machine operator, assembly-line worker) can attest to the physical discomforts they may experience. These may include: sore feet, swelling of the legs, general muscular fatigue, low back pain, and stiffness in the neck and shoulders. There are a variety of health problems that may be caused by prolonged and frequent standing. Without some relief by walking, blood may pool in the legs and feet. This can cause inflammation of the veins that may progress over time to painful varicose veins. Excessive standing also causes the joints in the spine, hips, knees and feet to become temporarily immobilized or locked. This immobility can later lead to rheumatic diseases due to degenerative damage to the tendons and ligaments.

If you spend most of your time at work standing, there are things you can do to reduce the ill effects on your posture.

Workstation set up

Any stand-up workstation should be adjusted according to your height, using elbow height as the guide. For example, precision work, such as writing or electronic assembly, requires a work surface that's 5 cm above elbow height; your elbows should be supported. Light work, such as assembly-line or mechanical jobs, require a work surface that is 5 to 10 cm

below elbow height. Heavy work, demanding downward forces, requires a surface that is 20 to 40 cm below elbow height.

Proper position

If you work in a standing position, always face what you're working on, keeping your body close to the work. Adjust the workspace so that you have enough space to change working position. Use a foot rail or portable footrest to shift your body weight from both legs to one or the other leg. Use a seat whenever possible while working, or at least during rest breaks. Avoid over-reaching behind or above the shoulder line, or beyond the point of what is comfortable. Instead of reaching, shift your feet to face the object.

If you must stand to work, take frequent rest breaks. Find ways to change position as much as possible while you work.

Comfortable footwear

If your feet are not comfortable, nor are your legs, hips and back. The comfort of your feet depends largely on your footwear. Choose CSA-approved footwear with the proper ratings for the hazards in your workplace. Your shoes should be as wide as your feet, leaving room to move your toes. They should have arch supports to prevent flattening of the feet, and a heel with a firm grip to prevent slipping. Lace-up shoes are best, because they allow you to tighten the instep of your footwear, keeping your foot from slipping inside the shoe or boot. The footwear should have heels that are not flat, but are no higher than 5 cm (2 inches). Wear padding under the tongue if you suffer from tenderness over the bones at the top of the foot. And if you work on a metal or cement floor, cushion your foot with a shock-absorbing insole.

Proper standing surface

The floor you stand on also greatly affects your level of comfort. Wooden, cork or rubber-covered floors are far preferable to concrete or metal, but if you must stand on hard floors, stand on mats. Floor mats should have slanted edges to help prevent tripping. They must be dense enough to cushion the feet, but not too thick. Too much cushioning, from thick foam rubber mats, for example, can cause fatigue and increase the hazard of tripping.

Remember that the ideal position is one that changes frequently.

Resources:

<http://ohsonline.com/Articles/2003/04/Improved-Ergonomics-for-Standing-Work.aspx>

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

<http://www.hazards.org/standing/>

Source: The Health & Safety Report (OSH Answers), by the Canadian Center for Occupational Health and Safety, Volume 11, Issue 10, October 2013.