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Newsletter

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Work Space Wellness

According to a study published by economic and social policy researchers at the Urban Institute, there were twice as many jobs that required some form of exertion in the 1950's as there are today. This means that more and more people are sitting at desks doing jobs that require no physical effort. While our lives have become sedentary, so have our jobs.

Lack of Movement

Sitting for long hours at a desk, especially with poor posture, can have a lasting negative effect on your spine resulting in back pain or discomfort. According to the Georgetown University Center on an Aging Society, back pain is one of the most common reasons for missed work, regardless of age.

Another problem related to a lack of movement can be joint discomfort. Motion is life – the body was meant to move. Staying in the same position for hours on end can make joints fill tight. Sitting at a desk may have the specific result of shortening and tightening the hip flexors, which are the muscles that help pull your legs toward your body. Tight hip flexors may contribute to back pain as well, since tight hips force the pelvis to tilt forward, compressing the back.

Other Potential Problems

Carpal Tunnel Syndrome is another typical problem related to desk jobs and not just pain, discomfort or soreness from typing.

According to the National Institutes of Health, it's also the numbness, itching, tingling or sometimes sharp pain related to nerves running through the forearm being compressed by swollen ligaments and bones in the wrist.

Eye strain is a common problem for office employees who spend hours a day staring at a computer screen. The results can sometimes be blurred vision or sensitivity to light. According to the Mayo Clinic, these symptoms, along with either eyes that are too watery or too dry, can result in headache or a sore neck.

Finally, one of the most common problems is stress. Any job that has you sitting at a desk for 8 or more hours a day will typically include deadlines and other high-pressure situations, leading to serious results. According to a recent article in Reuters, 1/6 of workers said anger at work led to property damage, and 2-3% of workers admitted to a physical altercation with a co worker. Additionally, a career development firm, RJC Associates, said that 22% of U.S. workers say they've been driven to tears due to workplace stress and 9% say that stress has led to physically violent situations.

Working for Wellness

It's clear that the lack of movement is the cause of most office-place health problems. According to the Principal Financial Well-Being Index, 41% of workers agree that having a wellness program encourages them to work harder and perform better at work.

A U.S. and Canadian company, PCL Construction Enterprises, with over 3,000 full-time employees has implemented a wellness program resulting in sweeping decreases in sick days and health-care costs.

Movement is Health

The first step to wellness in the work space is to get moving. There are many ways to accomplish this, and depending upon your office environments some or all of the following may be the key:

If you need something from a co-worker, don't call and ask for it, go get it.

Spend your breaks walking around the building, not sitting in the break area.

Set the timer on your cell phone to go off every hour and go for a 2-minute walk, or every other hour go for a 5-minute walk.

Get co-workers together for accountability – they can walk with you during your break times, or if your office setting permits it, they can join you for your 2-minute or 5-minute walks.

The point is, get up out of your desk chair and move. Sitting in one place for hours at a time has proven negative effects on your health, and walking away from an assignment for a moment or two can provide an opportunity to come back to your desk and look at a project or assignment with a fresh perspective.

Stretching is also extremely beneficial and should be considered an option. Talk to your Family Wellness Chiropractor about stretches that can be done alone or with bands or tubing.

Additionally, ask for a demonstration of stretches that may help release tension in the wrist and can avoid the development of carpal tunnel syndrome.

Water for Wellness

Keeping water at your desk will have many positive benefits. Besides keeping you hydrated, which is proven to help in digestion and with metabolism, it gives you something to put in your mouth that isn't coffee, soda or candy. It also provides a few excuses to get up and move every hour or so, one of which is to get more water.

No employer that sees a worker with a bottle of water at their desk is going to be surprised when they spend a few minutes every hour or two in the restroom. Again, any excuse to get up and move for a few minutes will take you away from your desk and get your body in motion.

Health Drawer

Everyone is familiar with the junk drawer but what about a health drawer? For those with their own office or cubicle, this could be a desk drawer with a few items to help promote health and wellness such as the following:

Walking shoes – If you're going to spend your breaks walking around the office parking lot then you're going to want to be able to step out of the high-heels or uncomfortable dress shoes.

Free weights – just 1 or 2 pounds each, but something handy to use while doing light exercises in the office

Stretch tubing – another highly beneficial item to keep nearby to work with in-office stretches to keep the body in motion a few minutes every hour or so

Raw uncooked nuts – almonds are exceptionally healthy, but raw uncooked cashews, pistachios and walnuts have proven health benefits and are also one of the best snacks to keep around for those late afternoon snack attacks

In Conclusion

With just a few minor changes to your routine, you can make a desk job the best job. Consciously deciding to get up and move around every hour or so can ensure that the typical dangers associated with a sedentary work environment won't become part of your life.

Back pain, poor posture, joint discomfort, carpal tunnel syndrome, eye strain and stress can all be helped by making movement a part of your normal work day routine.

Ask your Family Wellness Chiropractor for advice on how to use free weights or stretch tubing as well as other stretches that can be done in your work space. Walking tips and other movement recommendations can also be helpful because the office productivity will not grind to a halt if you take 2 minutes every hour to walk away from your desk.