

# Experts Weigh in on the Importance of Office Ergonomics

## WORKPLACE WELLNESS

Pros in the alternative seating space explain how ergonomic options support employees benefit the office.



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### How can employers better invest in employee health?

**Josh Kerst:** Employers should consider replacing traditional sedentary cubical desks with standing desks, memory foam mats and active ergonomic seating to support healthier work environments. If organizations are hesitant to take on an entire office redesign they can start by simply adding stand-up collaboration areas and designating walking meeting pathways to promote wellness.

**Jonathan Puleio:** Much of today's investment in employee health is focused on improving nutrition, fitness levels and mental health. Ironically, there has been much less investment on how to improve employee health outcomes while at work. Improved workstation design, for instance, can dramatically improve employee health, provided employees are trained on proper workstation setup and have the work tools necessary to achieve and maintain neutral working postures. Common musculoskeletal problems ranging from muscle soreness to tendon and nerve related pain to lower back disorders can often be prevented through improved workstation design.

### How can improved office ergonomics and an emphasis on physical movement throughout the day lead to increased employee productivity?

**JK:** Research now demonstrates that those who are physically active at work may become 11 to 15 percent more productive. In addition, employees who attend stand-up meetings demonstrate better collaboration skills, higher engagement and less idea territoriality when compared to regular sitting meetings. When employees move around the office, the likelihood of collaboration with coworkers increases, which can lead to creative conversations and more cross-functional solutions.

**JP:** Employee productivity is a bit difficult to quantify today given the nature of our tasks. Very few companies have metrics in place to gauge the productivity levels of their knowledge workers. That said, we are fairly certain that uncomfortable workers are less productive and are subsequently costlier. Improved office ergonomics with an emphasis on movement can measurably reduce discomfort levels and injury rates. Using these metrics, we can deduce that there would be an impact on worker output. The reduced costs associated with maintaining a healthier workforce should also translate into higher profitability per employee, which could be viewed as a measure of increased productivity.

### What advice would you give to employers to promote more physical activity and movement within their workplace?

**JK:** The key is to start by educating employees on why movement is essential for their health and share the positive influence movement can have on their individual performance and business outcomes. Provide a variety activity permissive work zones and furniture options that encourage people to freely choose any workspace that aligns to their activity needs and to help get their job done.

**JP:** Height adjustable workstations and sit/stand devices are excellent for reducing prolonged sitting, but only if they are utilized on a consistent basis. My advice would be to emphasize training and education when implementing sit/stand workstations. The current recommendation is to stand for approximately 2 hours per day in 15 year intervals. This implies that the equipment needs to be adjusted frequently to maximize benefit to the employee. If the equipment is difficult to adjust or simply too time consuming to adjust, employees will often reject the concept entirely. Well-designed equipment coupled with a quality ergonomics training program will help organizations achieved their desired results.