



Public Health
England



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The Sedentary Office: a growing case for change towards better health and productivity Expert statement commissioned by Public Health England and Active Working C.I.C.

An expert statement on the status and impact of prolonged sitting in the office, commissioned by Public Health England and Active Working C.I.C (who launched the Get Britain Standing campaign in 2014), has been released today.

Professor Kevin Fenton, Director of Health and Wellbeing at Public Health England, welcomes the statement and said: *“The expert statement supports the Chief Medical Officer’s recommendations to minimise the amount of time sitting still and consolidates the science into practical recommendations for everyday office workplace practice. We know that being active is good for your physical and mental health. Simple behaviour changes to break up long periods of sitting, such as walking to talk to a colleague rather than emailing, or holding standing meetings, can make a huge difference.”*

The expert statement, written from a group of international experts from the UK, Europe, USA and Australia, focuses on breaking up sedentary activity in the workplace. It recommends office workers build up from two-hours per day of standing and light activity (light walking) and build up towards four hours per day (pro-rated to part-time hours).

Professor John Buckley, lead author of the expert statement, comments *“What may be most shocking is that irrespective of your level of physical activity, prolonged sedentary working leads to a significant increase in the risk of: heart disease, diabetes, obesity, certain cancers, depression and muscle and joint problems.”*

The UK CMO’s reports on physical activity updated in 2011 included recommendations, for the first-time, to minimise the amount of time spent sedentary (sitting). According to **Gavin Bradley, Director and Founder of Active Working** *“British people sit on average for 8.9 hours each day and 70% of sitting time is at work. International research now provides compelling evidence that prolonged sitting has major health impacts and we are delighted people now have access to some clear and concise expert recommendations that can go hand in hand with the accelerating promotion of more active work-places and adjustable furniture”.*

An additional recommendation is that seat-based work should be regularly broken up with either active-movement breaks (for even as short as two minutes, 3x per hour), the use of desk stations that allow for periods of more prolonged standing. For example, in Scandinavia 90% of office workers have the choice of using sit-stand desks compared to less than 1% in the UK.

The overall aim of this expert statement is to provide guidance for employers and staff working in office environments to combat the potential ills of long bouts of seated office work. In the past five years, an accelerated amount of evidence has been published on the links between sedentary living,

including time at work, and the leading causes of morbidity and mortality (cardiovascular disease, diabetes and some cancers).

According to **Professor John Buckley** “Recent research findings on sedentary behaviour now generate regular mainstream media attention. This is the beginning of an exciting journey, where business and science need to share in the much needed significant investments to promote and deliver better health and productivity by preventing large swathes of workers spending most of their working day sitting down.”

PHE and Active Working commissioned an expert panel of leading British and international research experts in Sedentary Behaviour (details below) and the attached preliminary core recommendations (Box 1.) are provided as an initial guide for employers, ergonomists, office furniture and equipment suppliers and occupational health promoters.

The expert statement has received stakeholder support from: **Macmillan, Men’s Health Forum, Obesity Society, BackCare, Corporate Health, Leicester Diabetes Centre, NIHR Leicester-Loughborough Biomedical Research Unit, ukactive and Investors in People.**

The full expert statement, with 60 citations of scientific evidence is currently ‘in-press’ and covers the following elements: rationale, evidence and objectives; sedentary behaviour within the context of human physical activity; sedentary office environments; and the financial case for change.

This expert statement is being launched at the **Active Working Summit 2015**, which has the official support of **Dame Sally Davis** (CMO – England) and is being hosted at EY. The Active Working Summit will be attended by senior professionals, opinion leaders and decision makers responsible for wellbeing, productivity, engagement and office work space. The event will feature:

- leading international experts in sedentary behaviour
- key learnings on how active working can improve productivity, increase engagement and reduce absenteeism in the office
- research findings on the multiple benefits generated from reducing sitting time by 2 - 4 hours each work day.
- case studies from companies which have made the journey to sit-stand and why the trend is gaining momentum.

EY is delighted to be hosting and supporting the Active Working Summit 2015. **Gavin Pape, EY Advisory Director**, comments: “Active Working is a significant opportunity to improve health and wellness in the workforce, and increase productivity. Studies have started to show that changes in the office not only lead to improvements in the markers of health risk but also improved work productivity, quality, efficiency and greater senses of collaboration amongst groups of employees. The summit is an important milestone to hear from leading experts and share examples of the types of changes that can unlock these benefits for individuals and employers.”

EY is committed to improving the health and wellness of its workforce. In the UK, the firm has already embedded a culture of flexible working; signed up to the Department of Health’s ‘Public Health Responsibility Deal’; launched Health EY, a well-being programme for its people; and started to make physical changes to its offices, such as the introduction of standing meetings.

EY is also announcing today the launch of a voluntary trial of fit-bands to help employees understand their activity levels and enable active working. 88 employees have signed up to the trial which is using jawbone technology and it is believed this is one of the largest trials in the UK workplace at

this time. As part of the trial each employee who has opted into the scheme will be issued a wristband which encourages them to undertake regular physical activity and is also offered quarterly health checks so they can see the progress they are making.

Eleanor Rollason, EY Advisory Director, comments: *“Our people are our business. We have already put in place a number of well-being initiatives. However the introduction of a fit band trial is an important step towards helping employees become more active. We aren’t about to enforce lunchtime gym sessions or remove chocolate from the vending machines. But we are committed to creating a culture in which flexible and active working is possible to help enable our 12,000 employees across the UK to take control of their own physical health.”*

Box 1: Core Recommendations

For those occupations, which are predominantly desk-based, workers should aim to follow these recommendations:

1. Initially progress towards accumulating at least two-hours per day of standing and light activity (light walking), eventually progressing to a total accumulation of four hours per day (pro-rated to part-time hours).*
2. Seated-based work should be regularly broken up with standing-based work and vice versa and thus sit-stand adjustable desk stations are highly recommended.
3. Similar to the risks of prolonged static seated positions, so too should prolonged static standing postures be avoided; movement does need to be checked and corrected on a regular basis especially in the presence of any musculoskeletal sensations. Occupational standing and walking have however not shown to be causally linked to low back and neck pain and can provide relief.
4. Those individuals new to adopting more standing-based work could expect some musculoskeletal sensations and some fatigue as part of the positive adaptive process. If such sensations cannot be relieved either by an altered posture or walking for a few minutes, then the worker should rest, including sitting, with a posture that relieves the sensations. If discomfort does persist, then seeking appropriate medical advice is recommended.
5. Along with other health promotion goals (improved nutrition, reducing alcohol, smoking and stress), companies should also promote to their staff that prolonged sitting, aggregated from work and leisure-time, may significantly increase one’s risk of cardio-metabolic diseases and premature mortality.

Expert Author Panel:

John P Buckley¹, Alan Hedge², Thomas Yates³, Robert Copeland⁴, Michael Loosemore⁵, Mark Hamer⁵, Gavin Bradley⁶, David W Dunstan⁷

¹University of Chester, UK; ²Cornell University, New York, USA; ³University of Leicester, UK; ⁴Sheffield Hallam University, UK; ⁵University College London, UK; ⁶Active Working C.I.C., London, UK; ⁷Baker IDI Heart and Diabetes Institute, Melbourne, Australia.

Expert Advisory Panel:

Justin Varney, Michael Brannan, Stuart Biddle, Nanette Mutrie, Philpa Dall, Sebastien Chastin.

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For more information, or to arrange an interview, please contact:

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The expert statement is being launched at the Active Working Summit is being held:

DATE: 8 January 2015

TIME: 11:00 for a 12:00 start

PLACE: EY, 1 MORE LONDON PLACE, LONDON, SE1 2AF

To attend, please RSVP to Fazren Roslan: Email faz@activeworking.org.uk

Notes to editors:

* Whilst more evidence is required to add greater certainty to this set of recommendations, or evolve and/or change them, the key elements remain to highlight the potential ills of sitting for prolonged periods and emerging benefits of changing office environments that promote standing and movement. Employers need to evaluate the best ways to achieve this, whether it be changes to how and when people can take breaks which involve standing and movement or desk designs and technologies that allow people to perform their work more easily either at their desk location or from other locations within the office space in a standing-up position. On the basis that there are a large number of occupations which involve people standing and moving for considerably more than four hours per day (e.g., hospital staff, teachers, factory workers, retail and catering staff), it is expected that for office-based workers in general this should not pose too many significant physical or cognitive challenges.

About Get Britain Standing:

Get Britain Standing is a campaign to grow awareness and education of the dangers of sedentary working and sitting more than 4 hours a day. Our goal is to draw attention to the significant increase in health risks caused by sitting (i.e. heart disease, diabetes and cancer) and compelling benefits of converting sitting time to standing time whilst at work (wellbeing, productivity and positive attitude). The Campaign is funded by the social enterprise Active Working CIC (Community Interest Company) & registered in England and Wales with registered company No. 09154581.