

Working Standing Up

Nurses, hairdressers, cashiers and waitresses know what it means to work standing up. Not being prepared or working with bad ergonomics can take its toll and these workers often pay for it with their health. Do you recognize yourself in these situations?

WHEN WORKING STANDING BECOMES RISKY

Obviously, it's not because you work standing up that you will necessarily develop health problems. However, you must be aware of the importance of working properly and how to recognize the signs of fatigue. Statistics demonstrate that one out of every 2 female workers suffers from injuries relating to working standing up. This is way too many, especially considering that most of these work-related injuries can be prevented.

Generally speaking, the back and legs are the first to be affected. The injured workers must often consult a health professional, typically for chronic problems such as low-back and sacroiliac pain, as well as osteoarthritis of the low-back, hips and knees.

Standing, your body weight is distributed on your lumbar area and on your lower limbs. If you execute your work without proper ergonomics, your spine and peripheral joints won't be able to provide their support role.

GOOD WORKING METHODS FOR A HEALTHY BODY!

1. Space Organization

It is the basis of work well done. If your tasks require you to be immobile for long periods of time, make sure that you have enough room around you to be able to often change positions.

Objects that you frequently use should be within easy reach. Ideally, you shouldn't reach for things behind you or that are above your shoulders. You should always face your material and avoid any twisting of the body. Remember, your nose should be aligned with your toes!

2. Table height

Do you use a table as a work instrument? Check that it's at the proper height for your size and that it's appropriate for your task. With a precision task, your table should be 5 cm higher than your elbows whereas with a job that requires more physical work (for example if you need to exert pressure on something), your table should be 30 cm below your elbows.

Foot rests are great to reduce pressure on your lower-back. They should be roughly 6 inches high and only need to fit 2/3 of your foot, since they aren't designed to stand on. If your routine allows it, try to sit as much as possible. You will be able to rest your back and feet for a few minutes.

Make sure that you don't lean forward; your back must be straight as much as possible. Did you know that by bending forward by 20 degrees will create a 50% increase in loading on your spine?

3. What about shoes?

Work with a shoe that supports your feet without being too constrictive. Ideally it shouldn't stop your toes from wiggling around or change the shape of your foot. Laces are great to support the foot and prevent it from moving excessively in the shoe. As for heel height, your shoe shouldn't be completely flat but it shouldn't be higher than 5 cm. Above all, a good shoe should be comfortable.

4. The importance of breaks

Taking breaks is essential. Do some stretches of the neck and shoulders, as well as flexions and lateral bends of the torso. Stretch your back, buttocks and legs once you're home. It is crucial to strengthen your abdominals and back muscles to create a natural « support belt » to protect your back. At home, and at work when possible, put your feet up. This will help reduce swelling in your legs. Another trick is to perform leg pumps when you are standing, which is done by going on your toes and lifting your heels. This helps circulate blood in your legs.

Anti-fatigue floor mats are ideal to help reduce stress on the back, legs and feet. They also help reduce the risk of falls and protect from cold floors.

5. Are you an employer?

Be proactive in regards to the specific needs of your employees. Think of offering training sessions, for example: Do they know which injuries they are susceptible of developing? Many injuries that require your staff to take time off can be avoided. By focusing on prevention, you will benefit in regards to productivity, guaranteed!

Sources :

Association des chiropraticiens du Québec (www.chiropratique.com)

Centre canadien d'hygiène et de sécurité au travail (www.cchst.ca)

Université du Québec à Montréal