

# Should You Throw Out Your Office Chairs?



Organizations are grappling with many shifts in the way they deliver a healthy workplace for their employees, from onsite fitness and yoga classes to health food, walking meetings and more. As benefit costs rise and employees become more health conscious, workplace health initiatives become even more important to your organization.

Trying to decide what changes to make in your workplace can be daunting as you try to meet the needs of your employees while understanding that not all employees have the same needs. As office spaces have gotten more flexible, with mobile and the Cloud, allowing some employees to work from anywhere, options for reconfiguring the physical workspace can be part of a healthy workplace initiative.

Some of the hot trends organizations are offering as they seek to make adjustments to their workspaces have included:

***Multipurpose space*** – areas that function as workspace, meeting place, leisure and fun at the same time

***Shared workstations*** – instead of having a designated workstation employees work wherever they find space or reserve a workstation as needed

***Community tables*** – as opposed to shared workstations where employees take turns in a workstation as needed, a community table encourages many employees to work in the same space at the same time

***Movable workspaces*** – furniture and walls that easily move to allow for reconfiguration to meet workplace needs

One trend taking off more and more is the idea of incorporating **standing desks** into the workspace, allowing employees to spend hours standing to counter the sedentary lifestyle often associated with knowledge and office workers.

The idea of standing desks is not new, in fact standing desks have been popular for hundreds of years and used by many of history's most successful people including Leonardo Da Vinci, Thomas Jefferson and Charles Dickens. Somewhere along the line in modern history the idea that standing while working represented the work of a physical labourer, such as assembly line workers and professional, white-collar knowledge workers required the ability to sit and

think.

## **Seeing A Return On The Standing Investment**

The benefits of standing as part of a healthy workday are becoming more understood. A new study, published in Preventive Medicine Reports, measured the productivity of 30 call centre workers using powered sit-stand desks over five months. The lead researcher, Dr. Josephine Chau reported that workers who increased their standing by 60 to 90 minutes a day were more active and felt more energized than workers who used traditional desks and their work output was not compromised. They also reported being more satisfied and feeling more productive at work.

Another new study out of the University of Texas A&M School of Public Health suggests that standing desks may also provide a brain boost by enhancing cognitive skills like focus and memory. Researchers swapped seats for standing desks in a high school classroom. Students using the desks were evaluated twice during the school year with four computerized tests designed to evaluate executive functions – the cognitive skills we use to figure out the best way to tackle tasks and implement the steps to achieve objectives in addition to brain scans that measured changes in their brains. The research found that continued use of standing desks was associated with significant improvements in executive function and working memory. The researchers suggested that standing desks may provide advantages similar to those of exercise programs, which boost brain activity by enhancing blood flow.

## **Standing Desk Options**

Unfortunately the costs of shifting to standing workstations combined with the lack of momentum still keep many people sitting all day in their comfortable multipurpose, lounge-like workspaces.

The good news is that the prices for standing desks are coming down and more options for working while standing are becoming available. A variety of options may work within your organization to allow employees to gain the health and cognitive benefits of standing while working. Consider a few of these options:

**Tall Shared Workstations** – like cocktail tables or the long, tall tables you see in Apple I stores, these tall workstations allow your employees to all stand around a shared table, whether working on a computer or just working together. They encourage both standing and collaboration.

**Table or Desk Top Height Boosters** – These desktop options include metal and aluminum frames, wood and cardboard and sit on top of an existing workstation. From Wayfair.ca you can purchase a variety of tabletop options for prices between \$75-\$200 depending on materials, weights and sizes. Over at Oristand.com you can purchase a cardboard version for around \$50 (that includes shipping, the Oristand is \$25 US plus taxes and shipping). This cardboard box sits on top of a desk or counter and allows workers to fold and unfold it and store it as needed.

**Traditional Standing Desks** – Options include both standing desks that are adjustable and go from sitting to standing or standing alone, similar to drafting tables – the prices vary greatly from around \$500 and over per desk.

## **4 Tips for Getting Started**

To make change happen you have to begin somewhere; the initial investment can be fairly low, in terms of both cost and efforts.

**Start small** – Investing in an option that incorporates 5 workstations, this could include one shared workstation that fits 5 or more people or 5 tabletop or standing desk options. The Oristand has a low cost of entry, 5 stations for \$100 US (plus shipping and taxes). This option might allow you the flexibility to distribute these desktop workstations easily around the workplace. You can even consider this option for your virtual workers, as the cardboard options fold up quickly and easily for storage at home or for transportation between home and work.

**Gain leadership buy-in** – Gain the cooperation of a senior leader and team managers by outfitting them with the first standing desks and asking them to commit to spending at least 1 hour a day standing at their standing desk. You may very well find that once they start standing for one hour they will find it easy to keep it up and add more time each day.

**Educate employees on how to stand** – Inform your employees that they may require a few days of adjustment where they might find sore feet, legs and even backs if they are not careful; standing in front of a workstation is not as easy as just standing. Standing for 60-90 minutes a day for the first 4-5 days is advisable. The employee may need to have a small footstool nearby to place one foot on, additionally a stable chair can be used to rest a knee to relieve pressure from feet and backs.

**Offer some carrots** – Incentives such as being entered into a pool for a free massage or other small incentives can be offered to employees who agree to use the standing desks consistently for the first few weeks or month. The testimonials of your employees on the benefits of the standing desks can help spread the word.

At the end of the day you do not need to throw out your office chairs. A combination of sitting, standing and walking all together can help improve the health of some of your employees.

Sources

Desk Standing is Like Training For A Marathon

Standing Up for Learning: A Pilot Investigation on the Cognitive Benefits of Stand-Biased School Desks

Additional Resources:

Strict Vs Relaxed Neutral Postures: Neither Is Perfect