

Expert statement on workplace sedentary behaviour

16 June 2015, by Travis Saunders

Last week an Expert Statement commissioned by Active Working CIC and Public Health England was published in the *British Journal of Sports Medicine* titled "The Sedentary Office: a growing case for change towards better health and productivity."

From the [Get Britain Standing](#) website:

Based on the current evidence Active Working recommends:

- 2 hours daily of standing and light activity (light walking) during working hours, eventually progressing to a total of 4 hours for all office workers whose jobs are predominantly desk based
- Regularly breaking up seated based work with standing based work, with the use of adjustable sit-stand desks/work stations
- Avoidance of prolonged static standing, which may be as harmful as prolonged sitting
- Altering posture/light walking to alleviate possible musculoskeletal pain and fatigue as part of the adaptive process
- As well as encouraging staff to embrace other healthy behaviours, such as cutting down on drinking and smoking, eating a [nutritious diet](#), and alleviating stress, employers should also warn their staff about the potential dangers of too much time spent sitting down either at work or at home

I generally think these are a pretty good thing, and seem to match up with the available literature. I'm a bit surprised to see [guidelines](#) this soon in the game (research is really just getting going on this particular issue, so there will likely be a lot more/better evidence in a couple years, at which point this guideline will have already taken hold), but there's nothing in there that seems really off base from my reading of the literature. And I think

it's good that they highlighted the potential downside of prolonged standing as well as prolonged sitting.

Now the real question is whether following these guidelines will have any actual health impact (lots of reasons to think it might, but the research isn't really there yet as far as I have seen). That being said, I am using my [standing desk](#) to write this because there is plenty of evidence to think that standing is probably a good idea at least part of the time. And lots of good acute studies showing benefits of [standing](#)/walking. We just don't know if that translates into long-term benefits.

As a colleague likes to say, data clusters around data. Once people put out a recommendation like this, everyone else tends to publish data to evaluate that specific recommendation, with the result that research published in the next few years is likely to cluster around the specific recommendations of the guidelines, rather than looking at other volumes of sedentary behaviour (e.g. in the past people might look at the benefit of being above or below 3 hours/day of workplace sitting time; I would bet that future studies will focus on 2 and 4 hours, to be in line with these guidelines). So at the very least, this guideline will likely prompt people like me to study whether following these guidelines actually benefits people, at which point the guidelines will likely be tweaked or vindicated.

The full expert statement is available [here](#).

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