impact hr toolbox talk

Reducing the Risks of Prolonged Sitting

Many roles require employees to spend extended periods sitting at desks, workstations, or in vehicles. While this may appear low risk, remaining seated for long periods without movement can have a negative impact on health, comfort, and performance.

Modern working practices mean that sedentary tasks are increasingly common. This toolbox talk highlights the risks associated with prolonged sitting and outlines simple, practical steps that can be adopted to reduce those risks.

What are the Risks?

Prolonged sitting and limited movement can contribute to:

- Musculoskeletal discomfort, including back, neck and shoulder pain
- Work related upper limb disorders (WRULD) and manual handling-related strain
- Poor circulation, leading to stiffness and fatigue
- Eye strain and headaches from prolonged screen use
- Reduced concentration, alertness and overall productivity

Remaining in a static posture places strain on muscles and joints, particularly in the lower back, shoulders and neck. These issues can develop gradually and worsen over time if not addressed.

Key Safety Message

Remaining in one position for long periods increases risk.

Regular movement and changes in posture are essential to maintaining health, comfort and productivity.

Sitting itself is not the issue — it is the lack of movement that creates the risk.employees from harm, including stress-related ill health.

Practical Control Measures

Employees should:

- Avoid long, uninterrupted periods of sitting
- Stand up, stretch or move around at least every 30–60 minutes
- Take short, frequent breaks away from the workstation rather than remaining seated
- Use natural opportunities to move, such as walking to speak to colleagues instead of relying solely on email or messaging
- Stand during suitable tasks where it is safe and practical to do so, such as phone calls or reviewing documents
- Vary posture regularly by alternating between sitting and standing
- Make use of any adjustable workstations or equipment provided
- Carry out simple stretches during the working day to reduce stiffness and tension
- Keep hydrated and use trips to water points as an opportunity to move
- Organise your workspace to avoid unnecessary reaching, twisting or poor posture

Early Warning Signs

- Employees should report any of the following at an early stage:
- Persistent aches, stiffness or discomfort, particularly in the back, neck or shoulders
- Tingling, numbness or weakness in the hands or arms
- Eye strain, blurred vision or frequent headaches
- Fatigue or reduced concentration during tasks
- Early reporting allows adjustments to be made before symptoms develop into more serious conditions.

Remember

Sitting for prolonged periods without movement increases health risks

Good posture alone is not enough — movement is essential

Small, regular changes in position can significantly reduce discomfort

Short, frequent breaks are more effective than infrequent longer breaks

Early reporting of symptoms helps prevent long-term issues

Discussion Points

- How long do you typically remain seated without taking a break?
- What simple changes could you introduce to move more during your working day?
- Are there any barriers preventing you from taking regular movement breaks?
- Do you feel your workstation is set up correctly and comfortably?

Key Takeaway

Prolonged sitting is a common workplace risk.

By including regular movement, making small adjustments to how tasks are carried out, and reporting issues early, we can all can reduce the risk of work related upper limb disorders and fatigue while maintaining comfort.

Your next step to safer, smarter workplaces

For tailored advice, call **0330 236 9866** or email hello@impacthr.co.uk. Alternatively, explore more Toolbox Talks in the Impact Hub at impacthr.co.uk.

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