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Letter to the Editor: Static Posture Guidelines Have Not Kept Pace with Sit-Stand Adoption

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Letter to Editor

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I write in response to the continued circulation, in workplace ergonomics guidance and continuing education materials, of static seated-posture diagrams that have changed little since sit-stand desks were a niche product rather than a default office fixture. I think this is a genuine gap in current physical ergonomics guidance, and I would like to see it addressed more directly in future practitioner-facing material.

The traditional seated workstation guideline monitor at eye level, elbows at roughly ninety degrees, feet flat on the floor, lumbar support engaged was developed for a static seated posture sustained across a working day. Sit-stand desks were introduced explicitly to reduce the total time spent in any single static posture, on reasonably solid evidence that prolonged static sitting is associated with adverse musculoskeletal and metabolic outcomes. But in practice, I have observed across several workplace assessments that when workers transition to a standing posture at the same desk, they simply apply the seated guideline's proportions to their standing setup, often without adjusting monitor height, keyboard position, or anti-fatigue matting appropriately for a standing task, because the guidance materials provided to them rarely address standing posture with the same specificity.

The result, somewhat perversely, is that some workers using sit-stand desks report new or worsened shoulder and neck strain when standing, because the desk height was set for seated typing and simply raised mechanically without corresponding adjustment to monitor distance and viewing angle, or because they stand rigidly in one position for extended periods without the same postural variability the intervention was meant to encourage in the first place. Static standing, uncorrected, carries its own musculoskeletal loading concerns, particularly for lower limb circulation and lumbar fatigue, and guidance that only addresses the seated half of a sit-stand routine leaves practitioners under-equipped to advise on the other half.

I would ask that future revisions of physical ergonomics guidance materials, particularly those distributed to occupational health advisors and workplace assessors, include explicit standing-posture specifications alongside seated ones, with clear guidance on transition frequency between the two rather than treating the mere presence of a sit-stand desk as a sufficient intervention. Guidance on anti-fatigue matting, standing-specific footwear considerations, and monitor arm adjustability for dual-height use would also be a useful addition, given how often I have seen these details omitted from otherwise thorough workstation assessment checklists.

I raise this not as a criticism of the underlying research on sit-stand interventions, which I think remains sound, but as an observation that practitioner-facing guidance has not fully caught up to the equipment now widely deployed in workplaces. I would be glad to see this addressed in a future issue, and I suspect other assessors in the field have observed similar gaps.

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