ERGONOMICS, SEDENTARY LIFESTYLES, AND STAYING HEALTHY

For most of human history we were hunter-gatherers that walked or ran several miles per day. As we learned to cultivate land for farming, hard physical labor was still a large part of most people’s day. Then came the industrial revolution, and machines made our lives easier by replacing manual tasks.

Continued Evolution of Work and the Impact on Health

Work environments changed dramatically over the last 20 years with the technological revolution, and advancements now have many employees sitting at computer workstations most of their day. It is estimated that half of all jobs in western society are computer-based. Add to that people sitting at meals, during their commute, and more hours at home. Many people sit 10-15 hours per day. The lack of hard physical exertion throughout our day has impacted our health and fitness, and is part of the reason for the alarming rates of obesity in this country.

In addition to obesity, a sedentary lifestyle also causes other negative health effects, such as:

- A condition called Deep Vein Thrombosis—potentially deadly blood clots that form in the legs from sitting too long.
- Increased risk of heart disease, diabetes, and elevated cholesterol.
- Slower metabolisms from less movement, resulting in fewer calories burned and decreased blood circulation which causes lactic acid build up in the muscles.
- Back, neck, knee, shoulder, and arm discomfort from weaker muscles and tighter joints due to holding prolonged awkward postures.

A little more activity should counteract that, right? However, studies show that even 30 minutes of regular exercise per day most days of the week is not enough to offset the number of hours a person sits. So what’s the solution?

Healthy Habits

Incorporating ergonomics and wellness activities into a daily routine can do wonders to improve employee health. You and your colleagues can:

- Get up and stand at your desk at least once an hour, perhaps while you answer the telephone, read a document, or communicate with co-workers.
- Avoid sitting or standing in the same position for too long.
- Walk during regular work breaks – join with other regular walkers.
- If you sit during a commute to work, try standing the first and last hours of the work day.
- Eat healthier snacks in the workplace by avoiding high saturated fat, sugar, and processed foods during meetings.
- Begin a “drinking water” club to replace the sodas in vending machines.
- Adjust chairs for comfort, movement, and support, and remember not to stay in the same position or sit too long. The next position is the best position!

Create movement in the work day to develop healthy habits. Both employers and employees working together can help overcome the challenges of modern life and create a more dynamic healthy work environment.