

'Are we working (too) comfortably when working at home?':

Evidence-informed recommendations for managers on how to support staff in reducing sitting time when working at home

Prolonged sitting behaviour is an occupational health hazard for desk-based workers, and there is growing evidence people who work from home may sit even more compared to in an office setting. Sitting is classified as a sedentary behaviour, and too much sedentary time for long periods of time is bad for your short and long-term mental and physical health (even when we are active at other times). The World Health Organisation as well as the UK Chief Medical Officer recommend that adults limit sedentary sitting time ([click here for Chief Medical Officer recommendations](#)).

332 University of Edinburgh staff completed an online survey on sitting behaviour when working at home, as part of a project run by researchers from the Physical Activity for Health Research Centre (PAHRC), University of Edinburgh. **Results** indicated that staff spend an average of **90%** of their time sitting (**6.6 hours** a day) while working from home, which is higher than the average office worker. Participants also reported what they perceived influenced their ability to reduce their sitting when working at home, and these findings are reported below with reference to possible solutions proposed by stakeholders within the university.

*We recognise and acknowledge that not everyone is physically able to reduce sitting, and invite colleagues who are in this position to contact us for advice.

Staff barriers to sitting less

- Some staff sometimes get **immersed** in work and feel that **work demands** prevent them from reducing sitting, and are concerned that reducing sitting will impact **productivity**
- Some staff feel **social pressure** to always be contactable, at their desk, and present
- Reducing sitting is not an automatic behaviour, and sitting for long periods is a **habit**
- Lack of space, and lack of standing desks in working **environment** at home



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How could we help staff overcome these barriers?

Find opportunities to replace sitting with standing and moving

- Could your meeting become a walking meeting? This works best when you know you won't need to view a screen or take notes.
- Could you stand during the meeting and make it active?
- Suggest scheduling meetings to start or end 10 minutes after or before the hour to avoid back to back meetings and provide time for a break.

Lead by example

- Modelling active breaks and efforts to reduce sitting will encourage staff and show them that it is acceptable and possible to do so themselves.



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Have wellbeing conversations with staff

- Discussing homeworking experiences and sitting may be a gateway to broader well-being discussions.

Encourage autonomy and establish trust with staff

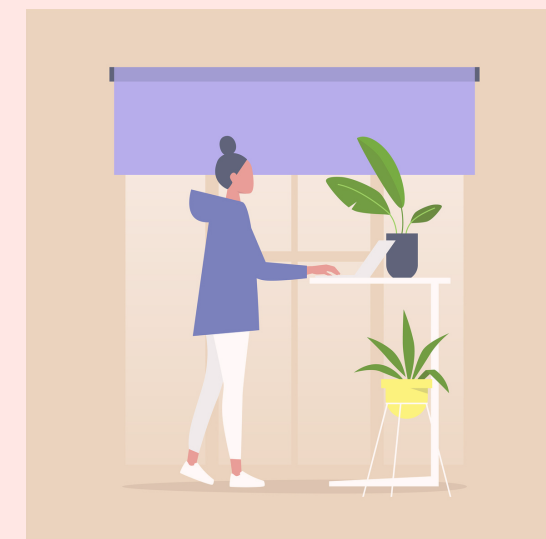
- Support staff to feel they have autonomy over break decisions, and that they are trusted to work from home.
- Establish clear expectations about the need for staff to be at their workstation and contactable.
- Explicitly encourage regular breaks

Encourage peer-to-peer communication

- Encourage and share peer-to-peer communication. For example, have peers/colleagues share how they deal with working at home challenges.

Share and signpost to information and resources

- Raise awareness about the importance of taking breaks and sitting less, and ways to help reduce sitting behaviour through sharing information and signposting to resources.
- Refer to Cardinus (online health and safety training) if appropriate: <https://www.ed.ac.uk/health-safety/training/e-learning/cardinus>



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