

# Sit-Stand Desks – HR (Health, Safety and Wellbeing) Guidance



## 1. Introduction

Prior to considering the introduction of a sit-stand desk (SSD) to any work area, HR (Health, Safety and Wellbeing) (HSW) should be contacted for an ergonomic assessment.

The decision to purchase and install a SSD rests with individual schools and divisions, though it is highly recommended that HSW be involved to ensure the appropriateness of the equipment purchased and its subsequent correct ergonomic set-up. It must be noted that some SSDs are not ergonomically appropriate for some users and can cause additional ergonomic issues and even injury. This must be taken into consideration when purchasing a SSD.

Although it is not mandatory for work areas to seek medical advice before providing a staff member with a SSD, when it is in response to an injury or pre-existing medical condition, such advice is highly recommended to ensure that a SSD will not aggravate the injury (see below).

## 2. Factors to consider when a staff member requests a SSD

There are several factors to consider before determining if a SSD is appropriate:

### 2.1 Why is a SSD required?

#### 2.1.1 Pre-existing medical condition (generally musculoskeletal)

Some musculoskeletal disorders may be exacerbated by prolonged sitting and/or may benefit from frequent position changes. A SSD can facilitate the required posture changes with little or no impact on work. Standing can aggravate some medical conditions, it is

therefore recommended that medical input be sought and a [Sit-Stand Desk Clinical Capabilities and Recommendations Form](#) completed by a Medical Practitioner to ensure that a SSD is appropriate and that standing will not aggravate pre-existing conditions.

Where a staff member's Medical Practitioner completes the Sit-Stand Desk Clinical Capabilities and Recommendations Form, stating that they recommend a SSD, the work area must consider USC's duty to make reasonable adjustments for the staff member's temporary or permanent disability in making the decision of whether to provide the SSD. HSW should be contacted for advice regarding the provision of reasonable adjustments.

#### 2.1.2 General health concerns

There has been much recent publicity regarding the sedentary nature of our lifestyle, and how our job may contribute to a sedentary lifestyle. SSDs have been suggested as a way of combating the negative health impacts of a sedentary lifestyle. Despite the publicity, this is not fully supported by research<sup>123</sup> with many authors indicating that standing stationary is also classed as sedentary behaviour<sup>4</sup>, intimating that standing may not reduce sedentary behaviour and is hence unlikely to impact the deleterious health impacts attributed to sedentary behaviour<sup>5</sup>.

Research indicates that sedentary behaviour and the associated health impacts cannot be addressed by posture change<sup>67</sup>. Increased activity and reduction in the length of continuous time spent sedentary (continuous sitting and/or standing), is recommended to counter the negative health impacts of sedentary behaviour.<sup>6</sup> This means that to reduce sedentary behaviour, movement

<sup>1</sup> Biswas, A., Oh, P. I., Faulkner, G. E., Bajaj, R. R., Silver, M. A., Mitchell, M. S., & Alter, D. A. (2015). Sedentary time and its association with risk for disease incidence, mortality, and hospitalization in adults: a systematic review and meta-analysis. *Ann Intern Med*, 162(2), 123-132. doi:10.7326/M14-1651

<sup>2</sup> Callaghan, J. P., De Carvalho, D., Gallagher, K., Karakolis, T., & Nelson-Wong, E. (2015). Is Standing the Solution to Sedentary Office Work? *Ergonomics in Design*, 23(3), 20-24.

<sup>3</sup> Shrestha, N., Kukkonen-Harjula, K. T., Verbeek, J. H., Ijaz, S., Hermans, V., & Bhaumik, S. (2016). Workplace interventions for

reducing sitting at work. *Cochrane Database Syst Rev*, 3, CD010912. doi:10.1002/14651858.CD010912.pub3

<sup>4</sup> Gibbs, B. B., Hergenroeder, A. L., Katzmarzyk, P. T., Lee, I. M., & Jakicic, J. M. (2015). Definition, measurement, and health risks associated with sedentary behavior. *Med Sci Sports Exerc*, 47(6), 1295-1300. doi:10.1249/MSS.0000000000000517

<sup>5</sup> Tudor-Locke, C., Schuna, J. M., Jr., Frensham, L. J., & Proenca, M. (2014). Changing the way we work: elevating energy expenditure with workstation alternatives. *Int J Obes (Lond)*, 38(6), 755-765. doi:10.1038/ijo.2013.223

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must be introduced into the work day, not merely changes in posture.

## 2.2 Has an ergonomic assessment been undertaken by a member of the HSW team?

Many ergonomic issues can be resolved by ensuring that the workstation set-up is in accordance with ergonomic principles. Adding a SSD will not correct poor ergonomics. It is recommended that the staff member book an ergonomic assessment with HSW before a SSD is considered.

## 2.3 Have other methods to reduce sitting or encourage posture change and movement been trialled?

E.g. work rave (work-rest software that encourages regular breaks); standing or walking meetings, etc.

## 2.4 What type of work is being performed?

If the staff member undertakes work that requires them to move away from their workstation regularly, a SSD may not be necessary.

## 2.5 Existing office layout/physical limitations of the space.

Built in furniture may impede the installation of a (fully hydraulic) SSD and add substantial costs. As explained below, the add-on style desks are not the preferred SSD option for long term use. They have the potential to introduce additional ergonomic issues and even injuries

## 3. Types of SSD

### 3.1 Fully hydraulic free standing SSD

A fully hydraulic free standing SSD is the preferred and most ergonomically sound option. An example of this type of desk is the "[Lüft Electronic Height Adjustable Desk](#)."

### 3.2 Desk add-on

Generally, HSW does not support the add-on style SSD (preferring the fully hydraulic desks) as the add-ons can introduce additional ergonomic issues:

- Insufficient room for writing, keyboard or phone
- Raised/uneven platform in seated position

A desk add on is only suitable for people who do not need to write whilst working on their computer (either they work largely electronically or they have a separate area where they can write), as there is insufficient room on the add-on desk. Even when in the seated position, there is negligible space to place writing material near the keyboard to write.

Generally, the add-on desk can't accommodate a phone, so if workers are required to use the phone frequently, it is recommended that they use headsets for phone use to prevent awkward postures (leaning and reaching) when using the phone.

There is also insufficient room for the keyboard and mouse to be positioned directly adjacent to each other, in accordance with ergonomic principles. A short keyboard would also need to be provided to ensure sound ergonomic practices. An example of this type of keyboard is the "[Bakker Elkhuizen Q-Board Compact Keyboard](#)"

As the add-on SSD also adds approximately 2cm of height to the workstation surface, chair height will need to be adjusted. It is recommended that HSW be contacted to determine if this style of desk can be accommodated by the worker in their current work space.

## 4. Consider trialling a SSD

Not everyone can tolerate standing while they work. If the staff member has not experienced standing to work, it is advisable that they trial this first before the work area invests in the purchase and installation of a SSD. HSW possesses one add-on SSD for trial. Whilst this type of SSD is not recommended for long term use for the majority of office workers, it is suitable for a short duration trial (two weeks) to see if standing to work is tolerated.

Should you wish to trial a SSD, contact HSW by email at [hsw@usc.edu.au](mailto:hsw@usc.edu.au) to organise a trial. Note: trialling this SSD will be dependent upon availability. Priority will be given to staff with injuries.

## 5. Concerns and questions

Any concerns or questions should be directed to the Health, Safety and Wellbeing team.

**T** 5430 2820    **E** [hsw@usc.edu.au](mailto:hsw@usc.edu.au)

Further information on ergonomics is available on MyUSC, Health, Safety and Wellbeing page.