



Fellowes



Get Ready

for a healthier workspace

A Little Movement for Big Success

Is a sedentary workplace harming your employees and your bottom line?

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for Sit-Stand Working



What is Sit-Stand working?

Sit-Stand working is the practice of using a dedicated height adjustable workstation to quickly and easily alternate between sitting and standing throughout the working day. Prolonged sitting has been linked to a number of health problems such as high blood pressure and elevated cholesterol. Introducing regular periods of standing and movement into the working day has been proven to boost health by countering problems such as back and neck ache. In addition it helps to make people more alert, energised and productive.

What does workplace wellbeing mean to you?

A basket of fruit in the breakroom, full of week-old bruised apples? A sign on the wall asking people to use anti-bacterial hand gel so the office cold becomes a little less common? A masseuse paying a monthly visit?

Or is it something more holistic? A solution that looks to go one step further than preventing illness and stopping absenteeism. One that addresses a lot of problems at once, instead of zeroing in on a single aspect of wellbeing. And one that helps employees to feel and work at their best, encourages generally healthy habits and contributes to overall health and business goals.

In many businesses the 'basket of fruit' mentality still holds. And perhaps that's understandable, with workplace wellbeing still an evolving concept for many businesses, that's come a long way in a short time. However a change is coming.

Employees are increasingly aware of what they need as part of a wellbeing package, with three quarters of managers seeing a rise in expectations. And a third of workers are quite prepared to change employer if the reality falls short of their expectations. At the same time, managers have woken up to the benefits of a renewed focus on employee health. And the more holistic approach is a fast-growing trend.

For managers or HR leaders, this may sound daunting or over-ambitious. Employee health might seem too big a problem to solve and the best response is to continue with a range of temporary 'quick-fix' solutions, without ever really addressing the root cause. Yet, as some forward-thinking European businesses have discovered, the answer to a big problem actually comes through a small change.

Today (most notably in Scandinavia, where it has been legislated in Danish employment law) Sit-Stand working is transforming the working and personal lives of thousands of employees, making them more productive, healthier and happier. And businesses are benefitting from having high performing, full-strength workers throughout the day, leading to more successful teams and departmental managers.

This paper examines the problems of the modern office, the health-motivated employee and the transformative benefits of Sit-Stand working. In doing so, it reveals an opportunity to turn the issue on its head and turn workplace wellbeing to your advantage. And demonstrates that a simple, small change in how people interact with their workstation can elicit a big change in how they work.

The Modern Workplace

Is it making employees ill?

Over the past 20 years the office has changed markedly. Often the driving force behind this has been technology, the new possibilities it creates, and the shifts in workspace design and furniture that it necessitates. On the surface, this seems like a positive thing – technology is about the possible, innovation and new ideas. But there have been huge downsides to the changing shape of the workplace, which are frequently manifested in employee health and wellbeing.

Let's take, for example, the contemporary trend of migrating from a fixed, traditional monitor and tower computer to a laptop linked to a screen, keyboard and mouse. We know that it's designed to facilitate hot desking, accommodate the tech relationships of digital natives, enable people to take their work with them to meetings and work more flexibly overall. However, it also makes the need for an ergonomically correct workstation set up more immediate – which presents a challenge. Partly because (although convenient) laptop working lends itself to sitting hunched over a screen, which in posture terms is about as bad as it gets.

In almost every office environment there will be people working for upwards of seven or eight hours a day in this fashion. And that's a huge issue for the businesses that employ them.



Veerle Hermans

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IDEWE

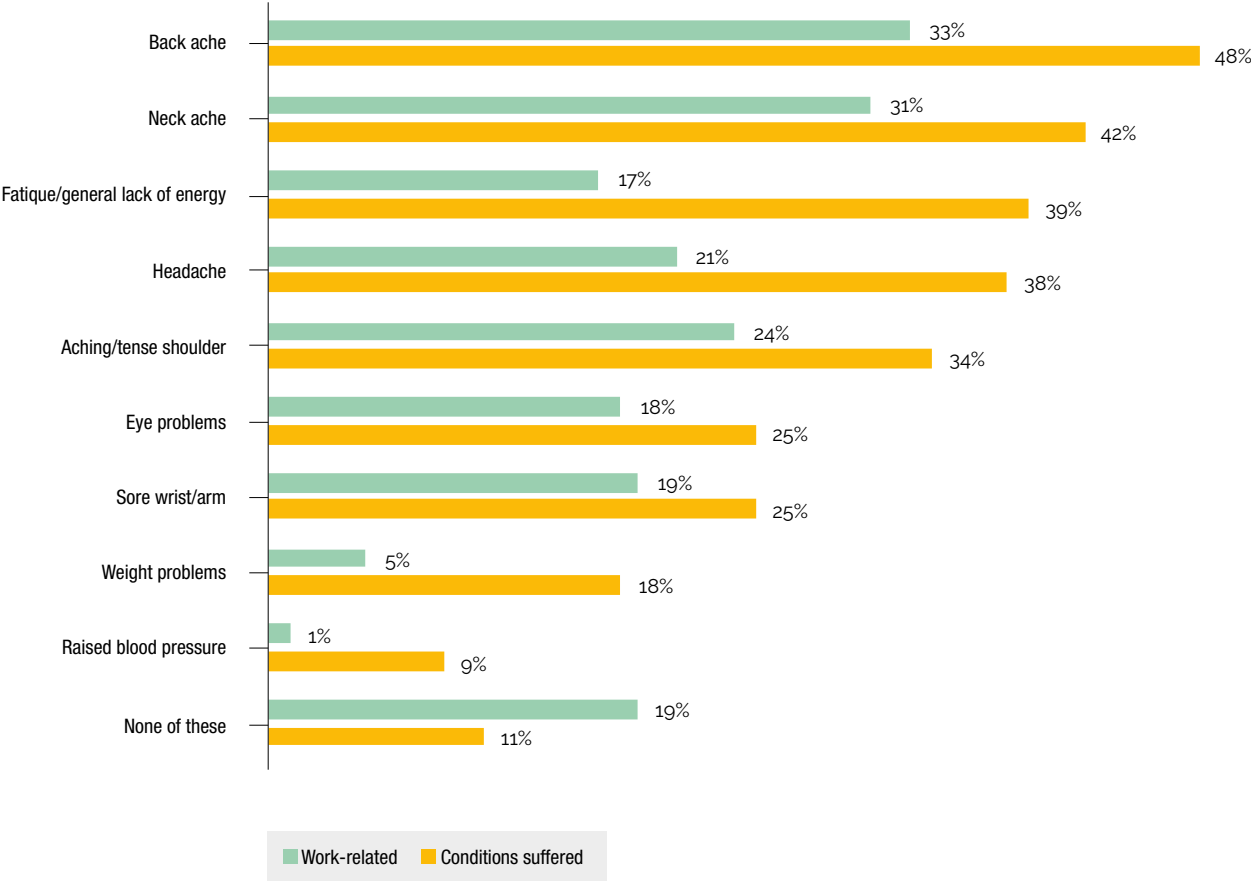


We know that there is a relationship between movement and psychosocial or mental issues. When we move, we feel better, we can relieve stress, and we have extra energy that goes to our brain. So there are a lot of benefits of moving more during the day.

The problems of posture

Recent Fellowes research reveals that 48% of workers suffer from back problems, 42% neck problems, 39% fatigue and 38% headaches. And, troublingly for employers, a sizeable number of them are happy to attribute their ailments to the long periods of time they spend working at a computer, or a laptop (as the graph on page 5 shows).

Q Which of the following have you suffered from in the past 3 years? And which, if any, do you feel are in some way related to working at a computer, laptop or tablet?



Businesses that are seen to turn a blind eye to illness-related underperformance are unlikely to be preferred destinations for the brightest minds of today and tomorrow

It looks bad enough as it is. People are suffering and they're blaming it on work. But it gets worse when the link to posture and inactivity becomes clear. As it did when researchers asked about the guilty habits that drive bad health, and the most popular response (from 49% of people) was 'poor posture', followed by 'sitting at my desk for too long' (41%).

These numbers should worry anyone who is in charge of a team of people. Working cultures that do nothing to challenge the sedentary lifestyle many lead are directly



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Prevention is the key, ergonomics has to be integrated from the concept of new workplaces, and not when it's too late.



Stephen Bowden

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Modern technology like mobile phones, email, instant messaging, online food shopping reduces the need for humans to move. One of the key movements for an individual's health is the process of standing up from sitting.

causing health problems. And, because these can be degenerative, whatever issues are caused now will continue to get worse the longer things don't change. This point is particularly pertinent for any business whose workforce includes a large number of digital natives, for whom tech-related health problems may arrive earlier than they will for their generation X or baby boomer counterparts.

Unfortunately, the impact on productivity and lost revenue doesn't end with ill-health and time off sick. The Fellowes research also reveals the growing problem of presenteeism, with a staggering 56% of people admitting to having gone into work with a health issue and performing badly because of it.

Needless to say, the implications of presenteeism are huge. Probably greater than absenteeism, which is also much easier to control. On the most basic level, the success of departments, teams, managers and businesses depends on having full-strength teams. While on a cultural level, businesses that are seen to turn a blind eye to illness-related underperformance are unlikely to be preferred destinations for the brightest minds of today and tomorrow.

Again, research bears this out. With people more aware of how varying factors – from diet and physical activity to the amount of water they drink – affect their health, they're simply becoming less willing to stick around at companies that systematically fail to take health seriously. So much so that 62% state that they wish they could introduce more movement to their working day, 29% say that they've thought about moving jobs because of the impact of their working environment on their health, and 51% of managers have seen good people leave their company because of the working environment.

Just dwell on those last two statistics for a second. Almost a third of all employees would quit their job because their working environment is bad for their health. And over half of the managers surveyed think they've lost people for the same reason.

This is perhaps the clearest demonstration of the importance of workplace wellbeing to workers that we're likely to see. And businesses have to take notice of it – not least because a workplace that's seen to have

negative connotations for employee health is untenable in the modern world.

Bad habits/Good habits

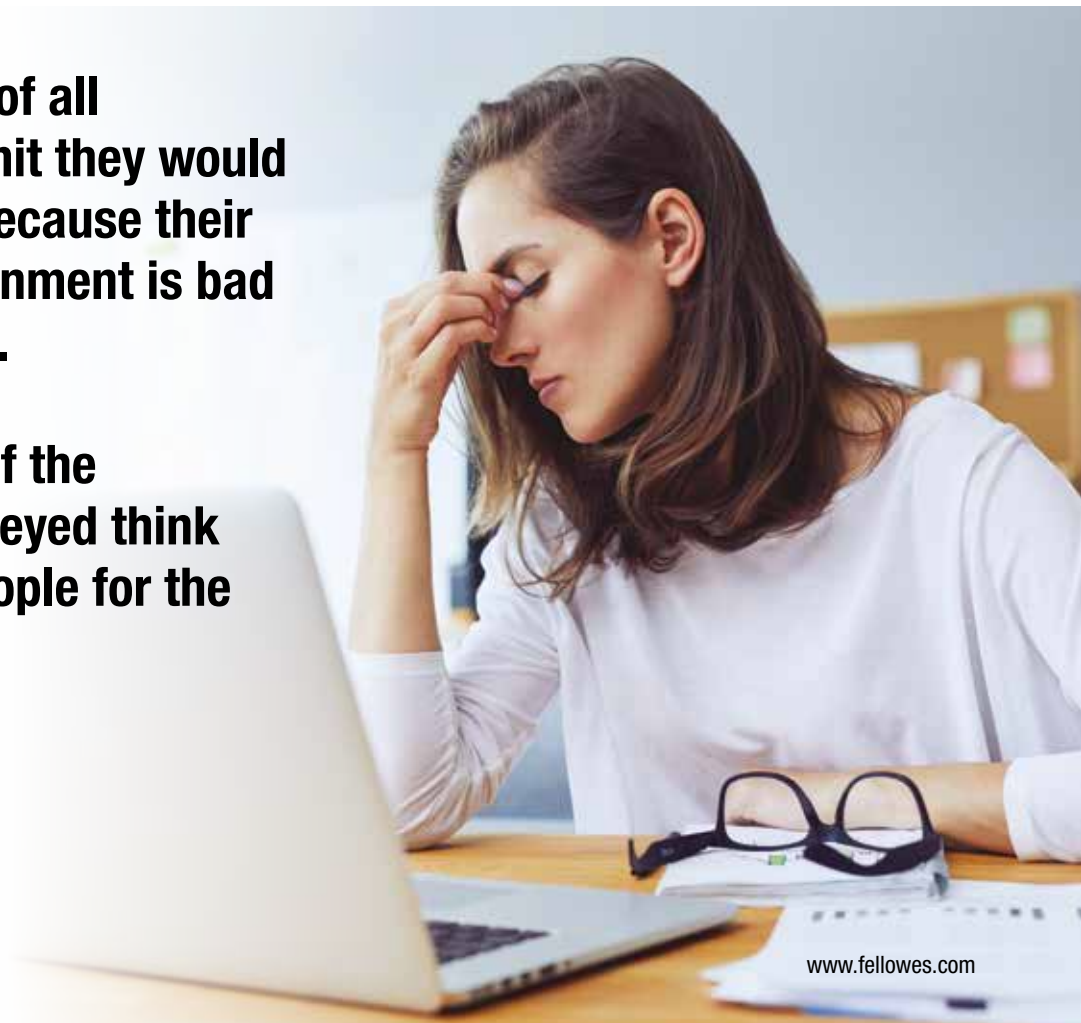
There are some worrying numbers for businesses revealed in this new research. And the overarching story they tell is that there's no excuse for offices to be a cause of health problems. Especially when they could so easily be a solution to them (indeed 70% of workers think that the workplace should do more to proactively prevent health issues). But statistics don't have to be bad news if they become the impetus to change.

Most of us spend the majority of our time at our workplaces. So they are the ideal environments in which to form good new habits that boost health, like Sit-Stand working.

As the next section demonstrates, most people are up for joining the Sit-Stand Movement. It's down to their employers to create the conditions that will allow them to do so.

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The Active Employee

Why movement matters

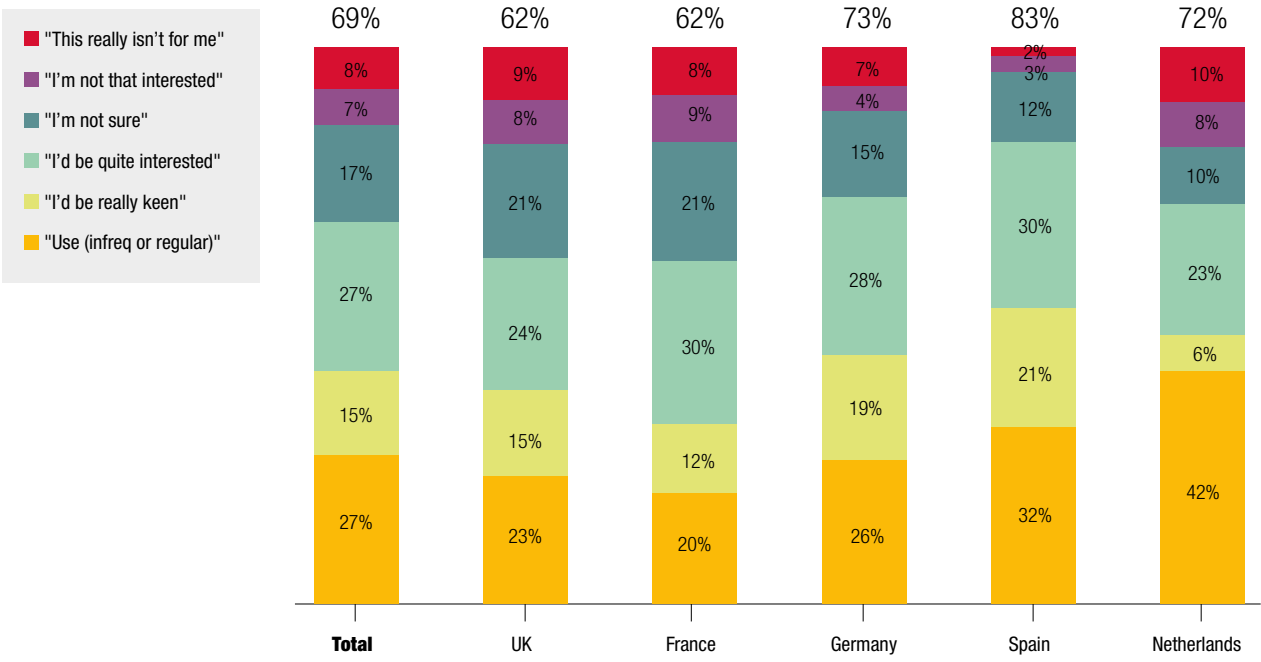
Health fads come and go. Recent years have seen a multitude of diets, exercise regimes and superfoods rise, grasp the public's attention and fall away again just as quickly. It suggests that health is a business of disposable trends. But what sits behind them all is an overall move towards wellbeing that's swept up millions of people across Europe. One of the core facets of which is the desire to integrate health into everyday life more and more – seen in everything from the popularity of wearable tech health monitors, HIIT workouts, lunchtime yoga sessions, office smoothie blenders and even the growing active wear fashion trend.

Put simply, people want to be active and they want to be healthy (according to Fellowes research 69% of people like to exercise at least once a week and around a third use software or devices to monitor physical activity). Yet, the place they spend most of their time – the workplace – is generally the least likely to give them any health benefits whatsoever. In fact the biggest source of sustained static, passive and inactive behaviour is when people are sat working at their desks.

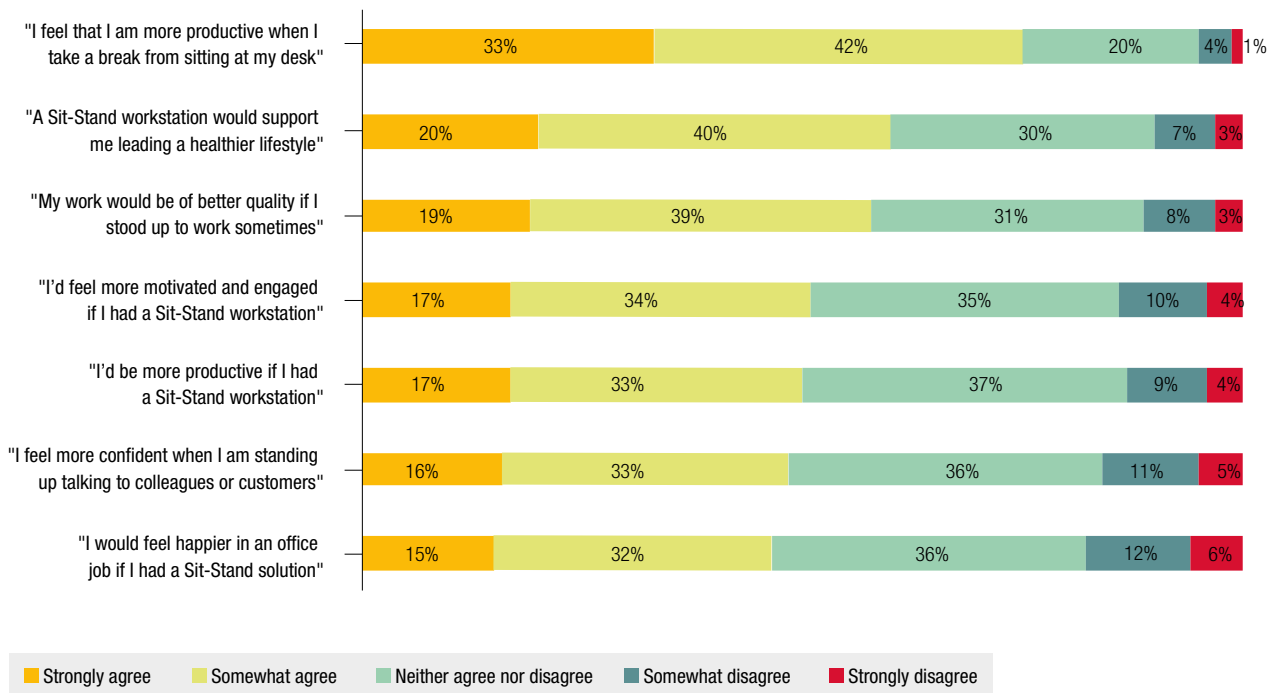
In part this is because employees have traditionally been slow to ask for better workplace wellbeing measures (just as employers have been slow to acknowledge their importance). The overriding mentality was to put up with things until a problem became persistent, and then ask HR or a line manager for a workaround to address it – like a wrist rest or a back support.

That status quo is now shifting a little, as people have become increasingly aware of what might really make a difference to their health. Indeed, as the graphs here demonstrate, the majority of workers across Europe either use Sit-Stand solutions or are interested in using them; and they are quite aware of how Sit-Stand can directly counter some of the health problems they experience because of a lack of movement throughout the working day.

Q How interested would you be in trying a Sit-Stand solution?



Q. To what extent do you agree with the following statements about the possible benefits for you of using a Sit-Stand workstation?



Moreover, people are coming to realise that small movement – even through the relatively prosaic act of alternating between sitting and standing – can actually add to a personal health goal. Whether it's running a marathon, generally improving fitness levels, or even greater mental agility – one of the great benefits of Sit-Stand working is its capacity to keep people more alert and less fatigued throughout the day.

This is what's meant by a holistic approach to wellbeing. Finding one simple and effective solution that can do anything from improving posture, energy levels and engagement or reducing illness, to helping an individual to achieve something remarkable because they are healthier.

Living proof

The manifest health and wellbeing benefits of Sit-Stand are enough to make most employees want to try it. For employers, however, it takes a little more convincing (indeed 43% will want proof of ROI on Sit-Stand solutions before they invest).

73% of Senior Managers think employee expectations around workplace wellbeing have increased

Up until now, the best case for Sit-Stand has been made by businesses in Sweden and Denmark, where the practice has been firmly embedded for some years amongst approximately 90% of workers.

It's no coincidence that the two nations are characterised by a healthy working culture, exceptional creativity and happy and productive offices. However, it's time to stop looking across to Scandinavia for proof that something works. And instead to recognise the tangible business benefits of Sit-Stand, and how introducing workplace movement can lead to more dynamic, focused and productive teams.

The Smart Employer

How business benefits from an active workplace

As stated in the previous sections, businesses tend to look for reasons to invest in wellbeing measures before committing to introducing them in their workplaces. They are reactive (rarely a positive trait in business) and are on the back foot because of it – potentially suffering from presenteeism, low productivity and lethargic workers.

Fellowes research can now state, confidently, that Sit-Stand working and an increase in movement throughout the working day can not only counter these problems, it can actually improve the way teams work, the manner in which offices function and how companies recruit.



Veerle Hermans

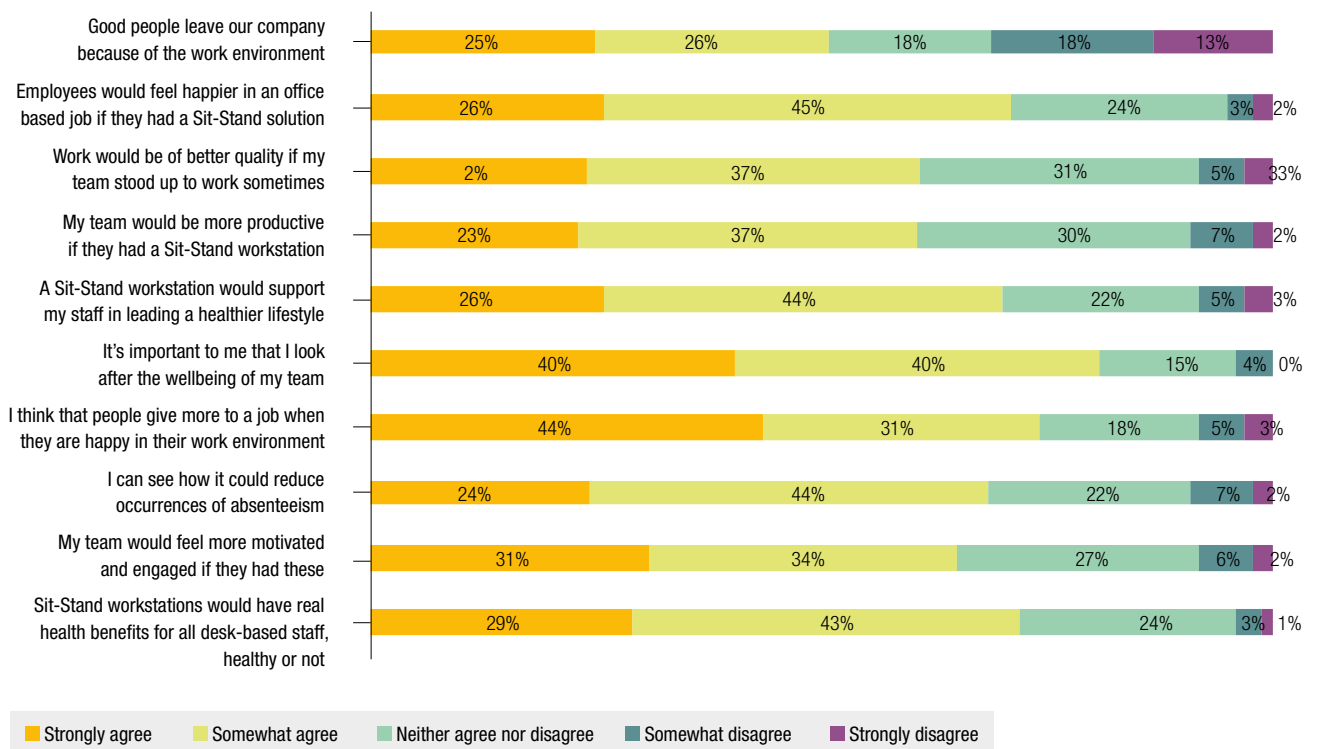
Head of Ergonomics

IDEWE



In a competitive world, it is important to take care of your workers and thus prevent possible risk factors at work.

Q. To what extent do you agree with the following statements about the possible benefits to the business of using a Sit-Stand desk?



Healthy, motivated, happy

The previous graph details the level to which managers agree with a series of statements about Sit-Stand working. It reveals that they think their staff would be healthier, more productive, motivated and happier if using Sit-Stand solutions.

These numbers overwhelmingly speak for themselves. But they also make it surprising and concerning that 81% of Senior Managers and 84% of HR Managers believe that Sit-Stand solutions are more likely to benefit those with pre-existing health conditions. Likewise the earlier quoted statistic that 43% of both groups want proof of ROI before they invest.

It appears that manager and HR sentiment about investing in employee health is entirely at odds with what they believe about the wide-ranging benefits of Sit-Stand working (particularly when lower absence rates and higher productivity is ROI in and of itself). The effect of such conflicted thinking goes further than causing a few bad backs. It goes to the very heart of how businesses function.

For example, introducing movement to the workstation environment encourages movement in general. Thereby promoting cross department conversations, inter-team collaboration and innovation, and greater interaction within businesses. Sitting hunched all day does precisely the opposite.

A new desk set-up based on a positive change is a good prompt to begin equally positive new habits, such as taking the stairs, making more trips to the water cooler or better management of energy levels and concentration throughout the working day. It supports and encourages a new and better frame of mind. Changing nothing lets bad habits linger.

And, on a more functional level, Sit-Stand and movement based activity ensures that wellbeing investment works harder. Whether that's through lower staff turnover, and so avoiding becoming a loser in the competition for the best talent – or through being a preferred employer, through first mover advantage.

Clearly for any of this to happen, a mindset change has to take place. Businesses need to switch from being reactive to being proactive. They need to align their belief in Sit-Stand with their willingness to invest in workplace wellbeing. And they need to demonstrate to workers today, and tomorrow, that they take health seriously enough to do something about it.



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Chartered Ergonomist

Morgan Maxwell



Negative wellbeing will affect productivity and may lead to short term absence, health concerns and potential exit from a company.

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The Business Case for Sit-Stand Working

The list of wellbeing-related issues linked to the modern workplace is fairly daunting. Whether it's the rising risk of presenteeism, the engrained risk of absenteeism, low productivity, disengagement, a lack of communication or a litany of health problems. And the impact of them is quite literally causing people to leave their companies, because they can't see a proactive, long-term and preventative approach to workplace health and, therefore, a sustainable future for themselves.

Because of this, solving the workplace wellbeing problem might seem an almost insurmountable task – requiring everything from an on-site doctor and a different workstation solution for every single employee, to a wholesale change to working culture.

What this paper has demonstrated, however, is that the solution doesn't have to be as complex, or as time and resource intensive, as that. Instead, it's actually quite simple. By introducing more active movement to the working day, businesses can ensure that their staff avoid suffering from the posture problems that sit at the root of so many health issues and which hit the bottom line. They can demonstrate that they want their wellbeing investment to contribute to wider health goals. And they can show talented staff that they want them to work at their best, and are prepared to invest to ensure that can happen.



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Movement during the work time should be implemented through non-distracting systems, and solutions that do not reduce the production capacity of employees.

This is why the 'basket of fruit' mentality surrounding workplace wellbeing must be replaced with the more holistic, considered approach. It's why encouraging simple activity is growing increasingly urgent. And it's why Sit-Stand workstations should be an integral part of the wellbeing plan for every ambitious, modern business. So that everyone can realise the benefits of being part of a new workplace wellbeing movement.



Research methodology:

Fellowes worked with the London-based research agency Loudhouse to investigate awareness, sentiment and opinions of health and wellbeing in the workplace, Sit-Stand working and solutions. We spoke to 4033 employees and 526 decision makers in five regions (UK, France, Germany, Spain and the Netherlands).