

BULLETIN

Risk Control

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by Peter Kuchinsky II

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Healthy Sitting Tips

The average worker spends nearly six hours a day sitting at work. Add this to another four hours watching TV or using a computer at home. Now consider your own day. How many hours per day do you spend sitting, either at work or at home?

Chances are it is a substantial amount of time. Between work and the number of things people now use computers for; you may easily be spending more time at a desk than anywhere else. This is why learning how to sit at a desk and still be healthy is so important.

The Downfalls of Sitting Too Much

Sitting for too long is not healthy. It puts you at risk of back pain, particularly if you sit with poor posture, leg cramps, tense muscles and, of course, boredom.

When Sitting at Your Desk

Keep your body in a neutral position. This means that your joints are naturally aligned. This reduces your risk of strain on the muscles, tendons, and skeletal system, and developing a musculoskeletal disorder (MSD). To achieve a neutral body position:

- **Move around.** Your body can only tolerate being in one position for about 20 minutes before it starts to feel uncomfortable. About every 15 minutes, stand, stretch, walk around or change your position.
- **Reduce repetitive movements.** Movements that you repeat over and over, such as answering the phone or reaching for files, can lead to strains and stress. Reduce

unnecessary movements as much as possible. Keep items you use often within arms reach and using tools, like a cordless phone headset, to reduce repetitive movements. You should also alternate the hand you use to operate your computer's mouse.

- **Keep your computer monitor in the correct position.**

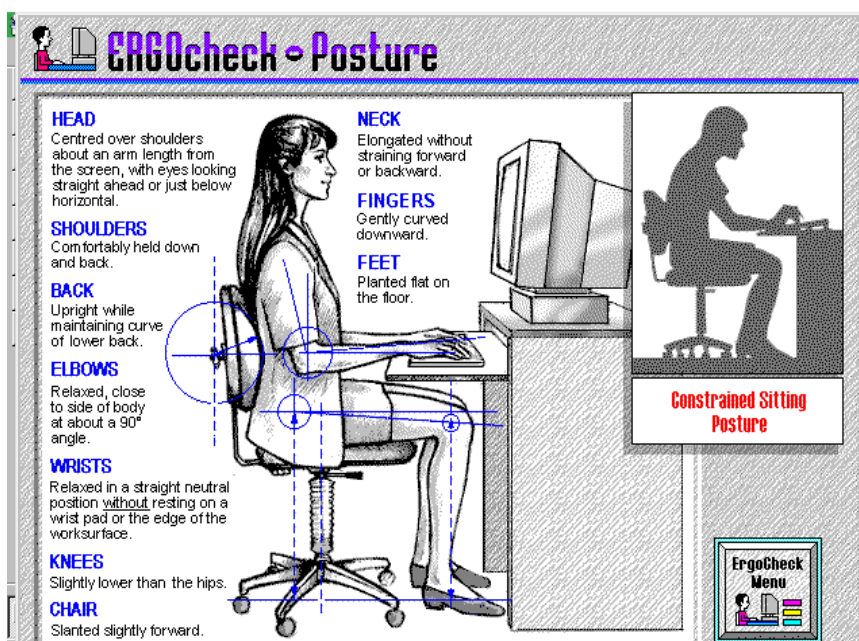
This means directly in front of you, but at least 20 inches away. The top of the screen should be at or below your eye level, and it should be perpendicular to the window in order to reduce glare.

- **Look away from your computer screen often.**

Focusing on a computer screen for too long can lead to dry eyes

and eye fatigue. Be sure to change your focus often, looking at a point in the distance, and blink regularly to keep your eyes moist.

- **Use a document holder.** It should be at the same height and distance as your computer monitor. Document holders that can be mounted to the monitor are ideal for this purpose.
- **Keep your keyboard and other office accessories clean.** Keyboards, phones, and other office equipment are breeding grounds for germs. Desks can even have more bacteria than a toilet seat!
- **Declutter your desk.** About 40 percent of office workers say they are "infuriated" by too much clutter on their desks. Save yourself from this stress by taking a few minutes each day to go through papers. Throw away those you do not need and file those you do.



- **Get rid of the junk food.** The temptation is simply too high to eat junk food while sitting. Unhealthy snacks can make you feel sluggish, tired, or guilty. Instead, keep a supply of healthy snacks nearby to satisfy your hunger in a smart way. Great snacks include cut-up vegetables, a few nuts, fresh fruit, or a hard-boiled egg.
- **Make your desk your own.** While keeping away from too much clutter is good, adding a few items that mean something to you will make your desk more enjoyable. Some items to consider include pictures of family or friends, a plant, inspirational posters, or paintings for the wall. These types of mementos can make you feel good throughout the day.

Who is a “Competent” or “Authorized” Person”?

The term "competent" or "authorized" person" is used in many OSHA standards and documents. Generally, these terms are not specifically defined or well understood. In a broad sense, a competent or authorized person is an individual who, by way of training and/or experience, is knowledgeable of applicable standards, is capable of identifying workplace hazards relating to the specific operation, is designated by the employer, and has authority to take appropriate actions. Some standards add additional specific requirements that must be met by the competent or authorized person.

Qualifications to be reviewed, verified and documented before assigning an individual as a competent or authorized person include:

- Formal Training
- Years of Experience
- Union Apprenticeship
- Informal Training
- On-The-Job Performance

The employer must make an evaluation before an individual can be made a competent or authorized person. This evaluation must include a review of an individual’s knowledge of the systems, equipment, company policy and procedures, the proper use, inspection and maintenance of equipment. Once an individual has been designated as a competent or authorized person, they are delegated the responsibility and authority by the employer for coordinating safety, work activities, and operations covered by the designation.

Areas in the water industry that often require the assignment of a competent or authorized person before work can begin include:

- Asbestos
- Confined Space Entry
- Energized Electrical Work
- Equipment Operator
- Excavations
- Fall Protection
- Forklift Operator
- Ladders
- Lockout / Tagout
- Personal Protective Equipment
- Scaffolds
- Traffic Control & Flagging
- Welding

The JPIA Risk Management staff has developed a number of forms that members may use to document the qualifications of an individual as a competent or authorized person. Ask your Risk Management Consultant to send these forms, or review your competent and authorized person procedures during their next visit. Visits are scheduled with Districts at least annually, to conduct risk assessments and provide training for Members.

Call 8-1-1 = Smart Excavation

A new national "Call Before You Dig" number, **8-1-1** was created to help protect you from unintentionally hitting underground utility lines while working on excavation projects. People planning excavation projects often make assumptions about whether or not they should get utility lines marked, due to concerns about project delays, costs, and previous calls about other projects. These assumptions can be costly or life threatening.

Every excavation job requires a call – even small projects. If you hit an underground utility line while excavating, you can injure yourself, those around you, or disrupt service to an entire neighborhood. Under the *One Call Law*, you may be responsible for fines up to \$50,000 and repair costs.

California has adopted the new **8-1-1** number to help connect you directly to your local one call center. You may also wish to visit their websites for additional information and training opportunities. In Northern and Central California, go to www.usanorth.org; in Southern California go to: www.digalert.org.

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FLASH REPORT!

Cal/OSHA Issues Heat Warning

California's Division of Occupational Safety and Health (DOSH) have activated the Heat Illness Prevention Network, with forecasts of high heat throughout the state in coming days.

Employers are encouraged to allow workers to acclimate to the heat and take other heat illness prevention measures, such as providing ample water, cool areas for rest breaks when needed, emergency procedures in case a worker gets sick, and training for all hands on recognizing and responding to heat illness.

The National Weather Service has issued an Excessive Heat Watch for the San Francisco Bay Area for May 14 and 15, and is anticipating possible record temperatures in the Sacramento area. Other parts of the state likely will feel the heat as well. "It's supposed to be significantly hotter and could go on through Friday and beyond," DOSH Chief Len Welsh said in a conference call May 13. "It could go triple digits in the Bay Area."

The first heat wave of the year poses a special threat, since workers aren't used to the high temperatures. "People are not physiologically ready for the heat," he said. "We can't work people for too long at any one time." Welsh urged employers to consider shorter work schedules and planning their work days around the heat, such as starting earlier and knocking off at mid-morning, then resuming as the weather cools.

Other precautions include:

- Providing cool, shady areas at work sites so workers can take rest breaks of at least five minutes. Employees should not wait until they feel sick to take a break, and supervisors should encourage workers to rest. "A lot of small breaks are better than a long one," Welsh added.
- Making readily available plenty of cool, "inviting" water. "I strongly recommend providing ice," Welsh urged. "Keep the water nice and cool." The outdoor heat illness prevention standard requires employers to provide enough water so each worker can drink at least four cups of water per hour.
- Use a buddy system, and avoid allowing workers to go off by themselves to perform a task. Train workers to watch their colleagues for symptoms of heat illness, and know how to respond. Training for supervisors is critical, Welsh noted. They're the ones who make the whole system work.
- Be prepared for an emergency: Symptoms such as profuse sweating, skin that is extremely hot or cold to the touch, dizziness or nausea, constitute a medical emergency. First-aid trained workers should respond and emergency services should be summoned immediately. "Call 911 if you have to," Welsh said, but make sure operators have clear instructions when being called to a remote work site.

Even if you don't have a formal heat illness prevention program in place right now, it's not too late to get employees critical information. Tailgate training sessions before shifts can inform workers about where water will be available, who is responsible for obtaining ice cubes to cool it, and other information.

"Let's not be penny wise and pound foolish," Welsh urged employers. One heat illness case is something an employer will never forget. "Just the fact that somebody got sick on your watch and died is something you'll remember for the rest of your life."

The Heat Illness Prevention Network was launched last year by the California Chamber of Commerce, California Farm Bureau Federation, and California Manufacturing and Technology Association, in

cooperation with Cal/OSHA, to warn employers about impending heat emergencies. DOSH manages the system. To join, send an email to communications@dir.ca.gov.

A number of heat illness prevention resources can be found on the DOSH web site, at www.dir.ca.gov/dosh, as well as the *Cal-OSHA Reporter* site, www.cal-osh.com.