



# BROWN

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## **Sit / Stand Adjustable Workstation Guidance**

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## Purpose

The Sit / Stand Adjustable Workstation Guidance was developed to provide guidance regarding the purchase and use of sit / stand adjustable workstations at Brown University.

## What kind of workstations are available?

- Traditional workstation: Consists of a standard desk and adjustable chair. When a standard desk cannot be adjusted appropriately for the employee, an adjustable keyboard / mouse tray may be installed.
- Standing workstation: Consists of a fixed-height desk that may be adjusted to the employee in a standing position. A stool may be used with this type of workstation.
- Sit / stand adjustable workstation: A workstation which can be used for sitting or standing. Some options are electric workstation (which are easiest to adjust), counter balance or pneumatic, and manual crank types.

## How can an employee get a sit / stand adjustable workstation?

A Brown employee interested in a sit / stand adjustable workstation must get approval from their department or have a written medical evaluation recommending a standing workstation to address a known condition. Student and Employee Accessibility Services (SEAS) office should be consulted to help coordinate reasonable accommodations related to medical recommendations and may be reached at [SEAS@brown.edu](mailto:SEAS@brown.edu).

Facilities Management may install sit / stand adjustable workstations as part of a building project.

## What are the advantages of standing?

- Burns more calories compared to sitting (20% increase).
- Reduces strain on the lower back from prolonged sitting.
- Increases muscle activity compared to sitting.
- Combats a sedentary lifestyle compared to sitting.

## What are the disadvantages of standing at a workstation?

- Standing at a workstation is not a substitute for daily movement and exercise.
- Standing can add increased pressure to the back, knees, hips and feet.
- Prolonged standing at work increases the risk of varicose veins.
- Standing to work is more tiring than sitting to work.
- Sitting uses less energy and helps stabilize the body to perform detailed tasks.
- Decreased privacy may be a concern due to standing above colleagues.
- An improperly adjusted standing workstation can compromise wrist and body posture due to leaning into the desk, increasing the risk of injury including carpal tunnel syndrome.

## Are sit / stand adjustable workstations effective?

Studies of sit / stand adjustable workstations show there is little evidence of widespread benefits and most users only stand for very short-periods (15 minutes or less total per day). Other studies have found that the use of sit /

stand adjustable workstations rapidly declines and after 1 month, the majority of people return to sitting all of the time.

## **Are exercise balls or treadmill workstations better for my health?**

Exercise balls or ball chairs are not recommended as a replacement for a good ergonomic office chair. These balls fail to provide any back support, especially in the lumbar region. Also exercise balls are not stable and can lead to slips, falls and even fractures of bones.

Others have proposed a treadmill workstation or a bicycle workstation. Both of these have been tested and shown to decrease computer work performance (typing and mousing slows down and significantly more mistakes are made).

## **How can I increase movement while working at my desk?**

Increasing movement throughout the day is recommended over a sit / stand adjustable workstation. Suggestions for increasing movement include:

- Set a timer to get out of the chair briefly at least once an hour.
- Stand while on the phone.
- Use a copy machine or printer located away from your desk.
- Get out of the chair to file.
- Take time to hydrate at a water cooler or sink.
- Avoid eating lunch at your desk.

## **How can I request a review of my workstation?**

You may contact [safety@brown.edu](mailto:safety@brown.edu) to request an Ergonomic Assessment from Environmental Health & Safety (EHS) to assess your current workstation. Make sure your supervisor is aware if you have having ergonomic concerns or need an assessment. EHS will provide guidance and recommendations on how to adjust your workstation and work in a properly seated position at your desk.

## **Purchase & Installation of Sit / Stand Adjustable Workstations**

Large projects involving the installation of sit / stand adjustable workstations should be reviewed by EHS early in the planning process. EHS is a resource to help select the best sit / stand options.

When sit / stand adjustable workstations are installed the following should be taken into consideration:

- Adjustable work surfaces that raise the whole desk surface up and down are preferred.
- Avoid pinch hazards (cords and fingers) by creating at least a 1 inch gap between adjacent surfaces.
- Follow manufacturer's instructions for installation and weight limits.
- Instruction must be provided to the employee on how to operate and adjust the workstations.
- Anti-fatigue mats may be provided for working in the standing position.
- Desk-mounted sit / stand products (used to retro-fit a traditional workstation) may create adjustability challenges and are generally discouraged.

## **General Guidance on Use of Sit / Stand Adjustable Workstations**

- Do not stand all day.
- Sit for 1 hour, stand for 5 minutes.
- Adjust the table height for standing to be approximately at standing elbow height.
- If you are using a stool, you may also consider an elevated foot rest.

- Make sure the keyboard/mouse height and monitor height are all ideal in both sitting and standing postures.
- Wear supportive footwear.
- Remember to alternate postures. Use a timer if it is hard to remember when to sit.
- Stand on an anti-fatigue mat, if available.
- Be aware of poor postures that come from standing too long.

## Resources

Brown University Student & Employee Accessibility Services website and contact information:  
<http://www.brown.edu/campus-life/support/accessibility-services/employee-accommodations>

Brown University Insurance & Purchasing Services website information for selecting preferred suppliers for furniture purchases: <http://www.brown.edu/about/administration/purchasing/ordering-goods-and-services/using-preferred-suppliers>

Occupational Safety & Health Administration (OSHA) Computer Workstation E-tool:  
<https://www.osha.gov/SLTC/etools/computerworkstations/>

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