

## Network to Work Meeting

Resource Materials – August 2017

### Workplace Wellbeing

#### Changes We Can Make to Protect and Foster Workplace Wellbeing

Here are some ideas for simple changes to protect, restore and further develop personal wellbeing. Much of this guidance involves avoiding risks of stress, and ways of reducing stress when it occurs.

##### Cultivate a More Positive Working Environment

1. **Personalize your desk space** with photographs of family, friends, even pets to help create a connection with home and feeling of support.
2. **Brighten your environment** with fresh flowers and plants, which will also lessen the effects of electromagnetic pollution from computer screens and harsh office lighting.
3. **Utilize meaningful quotes**, perhaps in the form of inspirational or amusing posters, to induce feelings of positivity and support through difficult times.
4. **Clear clutter and mess** – simply put things into neater piles, or store papers and other bits and pieces away in drawers – in order to experience a cleansing and renewing effect.
5. **Manage your environment, don't let it manage you.** Gain a sense of control and order by throwing rubbish away - including paperwork that you are unlikely to need. Organizing things around you so that you are in control of them, rather than feeling cramped or overwhelmed by tasks, notes, outdated reminders, etc.

##### Be Flexible

1. **Remember there are always different perspectives** on a situation - different ways to see things.
2. **Challenge yourself to think beyond your usual thought patterns** that may limit your options, your ability to find solutions, and your sense of freedom and choice
3. **Apply patience, tolerance and acceptance** to allow yourself to take full measure of a situation without churning up unnecessary and unproductive emotions and worst-case scenarios.
4. **Pick your battles**, focusing only on real problems and issues that matter. This will enhance your reputation when you truly need to make a stand.

##### Seek Help

1. **Seek out services and processes to support and protect you** if you feel you have been treated unfairly at work.

2. **Don't suffer in silence.** Look for help and ask for help.

### Take Rests and Lunch Breaks

1. **Allow yourself the rest that comes with your allocated breaks.** Don't allow inertia, habit or managerial or peer pressure to cause you to skip these breaks.
2. **Minimize working lunches.** Working at your desk with sandwich in hand and typing at the same time is counter-productive both to wellbeing and performance. If you feel pressure to work at lunch, your body will likely produce the stress hormones adrenalin and cortisol – which serve to inhibit digestion and prevent the proper absorption of nutrients and energy from food.
3. **Avoid “eating on the go”,** which precludes the needed relaxation and healthy digestion that comes when you give your body a break.
4. **Allow your mind and body to relax and refresh** by taking a break away from your immediate work environment. Giving your mind a chance to switch off for a short period benefits concentration, performance and productivity in addition to wellbeing.

### Pay Attention to Nutrition

1. **Avoid sugary snacks and large amounts of tea or coffee at work.** These can undermine emotions and mental performance, causing body and mind to swing between highs and lows.
2. **Eat healthier snacks and drink fresh water.** This keeps the body hydrated and in greater balance, which greatly improves energy levels and concentration.

### Exercise

1. **Move your body!** This is an excellent way to reduce stress and promote wellbeing. Exercise helps to dispel the hormones produced during the stress response, allowing the body to normalize.
2. **Incorporate running and cycling into your workday** whenever possible. Make the personal commitment to your wellbeing.
3. **Skip the elevator;** try walking up and down the stairs instead.

### Move at your Desk

1. If you work at a desk or spend long hours at the computer, **take regular short breaks, to stand up and even take a brief walk before returning to your desk.** Stretch your arms up and overhead, and roll your shoulders gently forwards and backwards to relieve tension in the neck and shoulders. This help reduce risk of back pain and tension headaches.
2. **Stretch and flex your muscles and skeletal frame** to counter the risk of repetitive strain injury (RSI) that can result from long periods of repeating muscle movements, combined with fixed positions elsewhere in the body.

### Pursue Relaxation

1. **Build time into the day for relaxation;** take a stroll at lunch, sit quietly for 10 minutes in the breakroom, etc.

2. **Separate work from the rest of your life** by relaxing after work. This can help to shake thoughts of work from your mind. We need balance between work and play. Relaxation is essential to unwind and shift from a work frame of mind into vital leisure and recreation time.
3. **Do what works for you** in order to take your mind and body somewhere different from your working self. Options could be listening to music, taking a hot bath, enjoying a meal with friends, reading, playing a sport, pursuing a hobby or pastime, meditating, or taking a yoga class, or something entirely different.

### Foster Connections

1. **Maintain and grow your friendships and contacts outside of your work environment.** Don't let work push friendships into a tiny space of your life, or out of it altogether. Keeping connected with people and maintaining the companionship and love of friends is very important for our wellbeing. Friendship and social interaction helps us to stay in the real world, to keep problems and successes in perspective, and to recharge emotionally.
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### The Five Ways to Wellbeing – A Summary

A review of the most up-to-date evidence suggests that building the following five actions into our day-to-day lives is important for well-being:

1. **Connect:** With the people around you. With family, friends, colleagues and neighbors. At home, work, school or in your local community. Think of these as the cornerstones of your life and invest time in developing them. Building these connections will support and enrich you every day.
2. **Be Active:** Go for a walk or run. Step outside. Cycle. Play a game. Garden. Dance. Exercising makes you feel good. Most importantly, discover a physical activity you enjoy and that suits your level of mobility and fitness.
3. **Take notice:** Be curious. Catch sight of the beautiful. Remark on the unusual. Notice the changing seasons. Savor the moment, whether you are walking to work, eating lunch or talking to friends. Be aware of the world around you and what you are feeling. Reflecting on your experiences will help you appreciate what matters to you.
4. **Keep learning:** Try something new. Rediscover an old interest. Sign up for that course. Take on a different responsibility at work. Fix a bike. Learn to play an instrument or how to cook your favorite food. Set a challenge you will enjoy achieving. Learning new things will make you more confident as well as being fun.
5. **Give:** Do something nice for a friend, or a stranger. Thank someone. Smile. Volunteer your time. Join a community group. Look out, as well as in. Seeing yourself, and your happiness, linked to the wider community can be incredibly rewarding and creates connections with the people around you.

*(adapted from Workplace Wellbeing, found at <http://www.businessballs.com/workplace-wellbeing.htm>)*

# Workplace Safety

## Recognizing Hidden Dangers: 21 Steps to a Safer Office

It's fairly obvious that safety and health hazards can exist on worksites filled with heavy machinery and equipment, where employees often are required to engage in strenuous manual labor. A job where most of the work tasks are completed while sitting in a chair in a climate-controlled office building would seem less fraught with danger. However, a surprising number of hazards can be present in an office setting. Falls are the most common source of injury in an office, although workers also are injured by being struck by or against objects, and suffering ergonomic injuries.

According to data from the Bureau of Labor Statistics, 80,410 private-industry office and administrative workers suffered on-the-job injuries in 2008. Many of these injuries could have been prevented had the risks been recognized and simple workplace modifications implemented.

Some simple changes to the workspace can be effective in eliminating hazards and reducing the number of injuries. Here are 21 steps you can take to reduce the risk of injury among your office staff.

### Falls

Slips, trips and falls are the most common type of office injury. The National Safety Council says employees are 2.5 times more likely to suffer a disabling fall in an office setting than anywhere else. Several hazards contribute to these injuries, although most can be significantly reduced, often by raising awareness among employees.

#### 1. Stay clutter-free

Boxes, files and various items piled in walkways can create a tripping hazard, according to OSHA. Be certain that all materials are safely stored in their proper location to prevent buildup of clutter in walkways. Further, in addition to posing an electrical hazard, stretching cords across walkways or under rugs creates a tripping hazard, so ensure all cords are properly secured and covered.

#### 2. Step on up

Standing on chairs – particularly rolling office chairs – is a significant fall hazard. Workers who need to reach something at an elevated height should use a stepladder. The Chicago-based American Ladder Institute cautions that stepladders must be fully opened and placed on level, firm ground. Workers should never climb higher than the step indicated as the highest safe standing level.

#### 3. Maintain a clear line of vision

Workers can collide when making turns in the hallways and around blind corners or cubicle walls. The National Safety Council suggests installing convex mirrors at intersections to help reduce collisions. If workers can see who is coming around the corner, collisions are less likely to occur.

#### 4. Get a grip

Carpeting and other skid-resistant surfaces can serve to reduce falls. Marble or tile can become very slippery – particularly when wet, according to the National Safety Council. Placing carpets down can be especially helpful at entranceways, where workers are likely to be coming in with shoes wet from rain or snow.

## Struck/caught by

Another major type of injury in the office setting comes from workers being struck by or caught by an object.

### 5. Shut the drawer

File cabinets with too many fully extended drawers could tip over if they are not secured, the Council warns. Additionally, open drawers on desks and file cabinets pose a tripping hazard, so be sure to always completely close drawers when not in use.

### 6. Safe stacking

According to the Office of Compliance, which oversees the safety of U.S. congressional workers, proper storage of heavy items can help reduce the number of office injuries. Large stacks of materials and heavy equipment can cause major injuries if they are knocked over. OOC recommends storing heavy objects close to the floor, and warns that the load capacity of shelves or storage units should never be exceeded.

## Ergonomics injuries

Perhaps the most prevalent injuries in an office setting are related to ergonomics. Because office workers spend the bulk of their day seated at a desk and working on a computer, they are prone to strains and other injuries related to posture and repetitive movement. Ergonomics hazards can be difficult to detect. Many office conditions that appear harmless can be described as hazardous from an ergonomics perspective.

### 7. Utilize adjustable equipment

One size does not fit all in an office workstation. Whenever possible, chairs, work surfaces, monitor stands, etc., should all be adjusted in order to accommodate the individual employee.

### 8. Learn how to use equipment

Providing adjustable furniture and equipment is only the first step in creating an ergonomically sound workstation. Workers also need to learn how to adjust the equipment in their work area and identify the most ergonomically beneficial way to set up their workstation.

### 9. Keep your feet on the floor

Often workers have their keyboard tray on the desktop, and they may need to raise up their chair so high that their feet can barely touch the floor. An employee's feet must be on the floor in order for a chair to be able to reduce pain and discomfort. Options such as adjustable keyboard trays or rolling tables adjusted to the proper height can eliminate this problem. Although footrests are a "second-best option," but their small surface may impede some of the worker's movement.

### 10. Use a document holders

Frequently typing from hard copy can lead to neck strain if a worker is forced to repeatedly look down to the desk and back to the computer screen. Document holders eliminate excessive cervical motion and help to prevent muscle imbalances. They are also good for the eyes, according to the St. Louis-based American Optometric Association. Keeping reference materials close to the monitor reduces the need for your eyes to change focus as you look from the document to the monitor.

### **11. Correct mouse placement**

Always place the mouse beside the keyboard. Having your computer keyboard on a tray, but the mouse placed on your desk can spell disaster for the neck and shoulder on the side of that mouse.

## **Vision problems**

Although looking at a computer monitor cannot damage your eyes, spending a large portion of your workday at the computer can cause eyestrain, according to Chicago-based Prevent Blindness America. Eyes can become dry and irritated, and workers may begin having trouble focusing. A few work area adjustments can help alleviate some of these issues.

### **12. Dim the lights and use task lamps**

Florescent lights in office buildings often are too bright for optimal vision. According to the American Optometric Association, light that is at about half-normal office levels is preferred. If more light is needed for a particular task, use individual task lamps rather than increasing overall lighting. Lightbulbs in task lamps should be fully recessed to avoid the creation of a bright spot in one's line of vision.

### **13. Correctly position monitors**

Prevent Blindness America recommends workers place their computer monitors slightly below eye level and 20-26 inches from their eyes. Screens that can tilt or swivel are especially beneficial.

### **14. Minimize screen glare**

Screen glare is a major cause of eyestrain in the office. To minimize strain, avoid positioning monitors opposite open windows, or be sure to always close shades or blinds. A glare reduction filter also can be used.

### **15. Wear the right glasses**

Workers should tell their eye doctor if they spend a large portion of the day working on the computer. The doctor can check the efficiency of vision at 20-30 inches – the typical distance a computer monitor should be placed. Glasses are available for computer use that allow the wearer to see the full monitor without having to excessively strain the neck.

### **16. Increase font size on computer**

Small font sizes on the computer can strain both your vision and your neck, as workers tend to pull the head forward to view smaller print. A simple adjustment to the font size on the computer screen can eliminate the need for this. "In many software programs, you can use the CTRL+ (plus) or CTRL- (minus) to increase or reduce the size of the page you are looking at.

### **17. Take a break**

Giving your eyes a rest and allowing them to focus on things at varying distances can help reduce strain and fatigue. OSHA recommends workers take a 10-minute break for every hour spent on the computer. These breaks can include working on tasks that require your eyes to focus on objects at a further range.

## Fire safety

Some routine inspections around the office can help reduce the likelihood of fire causing devastation.

### **18. Maintain cords in good repair**

Damaged and ungrounded power cords pose a serious fire hazard and violate safety codes. If you use one, inspect it regularly for wear and dispose of it if it is frayed or has exposed wire. Further, cords should never be used if the third prong has been damaged or removed. Make sure cords are not overloading outlets. The most common causes of fires started by extension cords are improper use and overloading. Extension cords should be approved by a certifying laboratory such as Underwriters Laboratories, and only used temporarily to connect one device at a time.

### **19. Inspect space heaters**

If you use a space heater, verify the device is approved for commercial use and has a switch that automatically shuts off the heater if the heater is tipped over. Also, make sure the space heater isn't powered through an extension cord or placed near combustible materials such as paper.

### **20. Never block fire sprinklers**

Furniture and tall stacks of materials can block the range of fire sprinklers, reducing their effectiveness in the event of an emergency. Objects should never be placed higher than 18 inches below sprinkler heads to allow a full range of coverage.

### **21. Do not block escape routes or prop open fire doors**

Never store anything along an emergency exit route. These paths should remain free of clutter, and fire doors should not be held open by unapproved means (such as with a garbage can or chair), as this creates a significant fire hazard.

Adapted from "Recognizing Hidden Dangers: 25 Steps to a Safer Office", from *Safety + Health, The Official Magazine of the National Safety Council Congress & Expo*. By Laretta Claussen, June 1, 2011

<http://www.safetyandhealthmagazine.com/articles/recognizing-hidden-dangers-25-steps-to-a-safer-office-2?page=2>