

# The New Ergonomics: Good Health through Inconvenience

By June Campbell

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You spend your day at a computer workstation or executive desk. The furniture item fills up the corner of the room, holds your computer, fax/phone/copier, scanner, filing basket and a year's worth of office supplies. There's enough space left over to spread out a picnic lunch if you are so inclined. You settle comfortably into a big executive type chair on casters and get ready to call a few colleagues in for a meeting. As you wait, you talk into a telephone receiver that you're squeezing in place by crunching your shoulder up towards your ear.

That scene is SO nineties, workplace experts tell us. The trend of the new century is towards office furnishings and office equipment that encourage mobility. Get rid of all that big, expensive office furniture before it kills you, they say. Replace it with a smaller "just big enough" desk and equipment that encourages you to move around as you do your job.

In other words, get rid of all that "convenience." Force yourself into healthy action by making your environment inconvenient.

In the first years of this new century, the health hazards associated with a desk job have moved beyond conditions like repetitive strain disorder and carpal tunnel syndrome. Not that we can forget about those conditions, but there's more to worry about now.

e-thrombosis is a newly-recognized condition that afflicts people who sit still for extended lengths of time. And, sitting still for extended periods of time in the workplace is usually associated with computer use.

E-thrombosis (medical terminology is Deep Vein Thrombosis or DVT) is similar to the condition suffered by long distance air travelers. It's no laughing matter. E-thrombosis can be life threatening. A blood clot forms in the legs due to long hours

of inactivity. The clot can break off and move into the lungs with sometimes fatal results.

Although only one case has been diagnosed at this time, researchers believe that e-thrombosis may have contributed to many cases of pulmonary embolisms, but gone unnoticed.

Sitting still for hours on end leaves us vulnerable to this and possibly other health hazards. And, according to physiotherapists, working out at the end of the day isn't the solution. By that time, the damage has been done and the workout could do more damage.

Prevention is not difficult. All that is required is that you move about regularly throughout the day.

Get a desk that's just-big-enough, or an e-work station with movable modules. Put that fax machine in one corner of the room and the copier in another. Provide yourself with articulated arm rests for computer use. Get both an adjustable chair and a fitness stool. Switch back and forth between the two, and at intervals throughout the day, sit on a fitness ball instead of the chair or stool. Sitting on the ball forces good posture and strengthens core muscles.

Have room so you can pace about as you think. Get a phone with a wireless headset that allows you to pace during phone conversations. Have standup work surfaces so you can sort papers, read reports or talk to colleagues while standing. Look into foot switches that allow you to transfer some of the computer tasks to your feet instead of your hands.

Walking around only five to ten minutes each hour is all that it takes.

In short, get moving! It's good for you.

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