

# HSE SAFETY CORNERSTONES

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## Sitting Is a Silent Killer: Help Employees Avoid Sedentary Risks in the Workplace

While you might envision a high-risk workplace as one that places employees in frequently hazardous situations—such as handling machinery, dealing with dangerous substances or performing heavy lifting—recent research revealed that sedentary behaviour (eg sitting for extended periods) is one of the largest culprits of work-related injury and ill-health. Indeed, over 80 per cent of UK office workers reported spending between four and nine hours a day sitting at their desks, totalling 67 sedentary days each year.

And excess sitting carries consequences—over 30 per cent of employees reported taking at least one day off work in the past year due to neck or back pain, 50 per cent of which were triggered by spending too much time behind a desk. What's more, sedentary behaviour can lead to a wide range of long-term health complications such as cardiovascular disease, type 2 diabetes and cancer. Prolonged sitting has even been linked to nearly 10 per cent of deaths each year. Even if your organisation requires employees to sit behind a desk for extended periods, you can still play a role in encouraging workers to live an active and healthy lifestyle. Don't suffer the costly ramifications of a sedentary workplace—consider the following well-being guidance:

- **Encourage standing**—Allowing workers to stand up throughout the day can help decrease their risk of back and neck pain, increase proper blood flow and improve their ability to focus. Consider implementing sit-stand desks at employee workstations and having standing meetings rather than having workers sit back in a chair.
- **Get moving**—Ensure employees are moving throughout the day by providing short breaks for workers to stretch and walk around. In addition, allow for a long enough lunch break that gives employees time to achieve their daily exercise.
- **Promote well-being**—Make sure well-being is a main priority in your workplace by ensuring proper [ergonomics](#) at employee workstations, offering discounted memberships to local gyms or fitness classes and holding various events that promote physical activity, such as a company walk or run.

## Company Fined After Two Employees Fall From Height

A construction company recently received a significant fine following a fall from height accident that left two workers injured. The employees were working on a new build of three terraced houses and had gained unrestricted access to a timber-joisted floor. The workers then fell through the ceiling and sustained serious injuries—causing them to be unable to return to full time work.

Further investigation revealed the company had failed to install joist hangers correctly, and there was no other structural support arrangement in place. The following prosecution resulted:

- The company was fined £16,500 and ordered to pay costs of £1,236.60.

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