Reducing prolonged sitting in the office workplace: The Stand Up Australia program of research

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1. Stand up Australia program of research

The Stand Up Australia program of research was developed in response to the increased awareness of the health risk associated with too much sitting, and the identification of the office workplace as a key setting in which to implement sitting-reduction strategies. This program, established in 2009, is a national collaboration between universities (Baker IDI Heart & Diabetes Institute, The University of Queensland and Deakin University), government, industry, and not-for-profit partner organisations. It includes observational, intervention, and evaluation studies, all aimed at understanding the benefits of reducing prolonged sitting in the workplace. The interventions are designed to evaluate the effectiveness of different strategies (organisational, individual, environmental), or combination of strategies, to enable adults to Stand Up, Sit Less, and Move More in the workplace, as well as examine the impact on health- and work-related outcomes. Many of these interventions have been conducted in multiple, large-scale workplace contexts, facilitating translation into practice. All have used objective measures of activity, enabling accurate insight into changes in sitting, standing and stepping behaviours.

1.1 Overview of findings

Our initial intervention study “Stand Up Australia” (1) used a multi-component approach, incorporating organisational- (management consultation, team champion training, staff information sessions, management emails to staff); environmental- (sit-stand workstations), and individual- (staff information session, written materials, individual coaching, support telephone calls, self-monitoring tools) support strategies to encourage adults to Stand Up, Sit Less, and Move More. Pilot testing (Stand Up Comcare)(2) reported large (=2 hours per 8 hour workday) reductions in workplace sitting time, with sitting time primarily replaced with standing. Notably, all intervention participants reduced their sitting time from baseline (3), and the intervention was well accepted (2). This intervention, including cost-effectiveness analysis, is currently being evaluated in a large, cluster randomised controlled trial “Stand Up Victoria” (4).

The additional benefit of the multi-component approach (with associated resource implications), relative to the installation of workstations alone was evaluated in the 3-arm Stand Up UQ study (5). Here, it was reported that sitting reductions were almost 3 times greater (-89 [95% CI -140, -38] mins/8-hr workday) in the multi-component arm compared to the workstation-only arm (-33 [95% CI -84, 17] mins/8-hr workday). This highlights the potential importance of these additional elements.

1.2 Current and next steps in the program

Our ongoing investigations within the Stand Up Australia program extend this body of work to examine: the impact of the built environment plus organisational support on sitting change; and, the impact of an organisational-support only intervention or an organisational-support plus the use of wearable technology. Within the research program we are also developing toolkits to facilitate the dissemination of these interventions into practice. A key element of the success of this program has been the multidisciplinary partnerships developed.
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References