



# Height adjustable desks: a boost to health, comfort and productivity

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## **Richard Andrews**

Director at Inspiration Office (Pty) Ltd

Spending those long hours sitting in the same fixed posture at a desk is doing your body no good and may even be causing long term damage; but the growing adoption of height adjustable desks in South Africa may prove the antidote.

Richard Andrews, Managing Director of Inspiration Office, an Africa-wide office space and furniture consultancy said people weren't designed to sit at a desk all day.

"But we're seeing growing demand for sit stand desks from our clients in South Africa. Giving workers the choice of adjusting the height of a desk can make a big difference helping people to work more healthily and productively as well as relieving back and joint discomfort."

### Importance of movement and variation

"While a good quality office chair offers great comfort and support, it can only go so far. As a result it's always a good idea to get up out of your chair regularly through the day," noted Andrews.

In reality what often happens is we get involved with our work and end up sitting far too long until the aches and pains set in and force us to move.

The beauty of sit stand working is it allows you to work in a wide variety of postures that can't be achieved while sitting.

"It helps to make for a far more natural way of working. And by taking note of our body's signals of fatigue and stress, all that's needed is a change of work position. This wide variation of movement keeps the body more active and healthy," said Andrews.

### Benefits to office workers

Variable height desk workers often report significant benefits when changing from straight sitting all day to this more flexible working method:

- It keeps them in better shape physically
- It helps to control weight as additional activity burns off excess calories
- An ability to focus and concentrate more effectively
- A greater level of energy
- Feeling more engaged in their work
- A much wider variety of positions, many of which can't be achieved with a chair
- Less aches and pains through being more active

A recent study shows the long-term harm of prolonged sitting. The American Cancer Society undertook a study of 120'000 people with no prior history of serious illness.

It discovered mortality rose by 37% for women and 18% for men who worked more than 6 hours a day sitting, when compared to those sitting for less than 3 hours a day.

### *How to fight back against sitting*

"There is a fundamental difference between the pressures on the body when sitting and standing," said Andrews. "When standing, your body's weight is spread through the hips, knees and ankles. Prolonged sitting inflicted undue pressure on the back's discs. A standing position reduces pressure on your back and allows weight to be carried via the legs."

A study carried out by the Human Factors and Ergonomics Research Laboratory at Cornell University found computer

users noticed a marked decrease in musculoskeletal pain after only 4 to 6 weeks of working at a height adjustable desk.

Dr Delgado, a Cape Town based Chiropractor, has advised that we also need to establish a healthy work pattern. As a rule of thumb, every 30 minutes of work should be spent as follows:

- 20 minutes sitting
- 8 minutes standing
- 2 minutes moving / stretching

Said Andrews: "Although this way of working is radically different to a conventional office desk, it's clear there is little problem to adapting to it for new users. In fact as the work position is so easy to alter, it makes it very simple to pace yourself and adapt to the new way of working, at a rate that suits you. However, people should always have the choice and work in the way that is most comfortable for them."