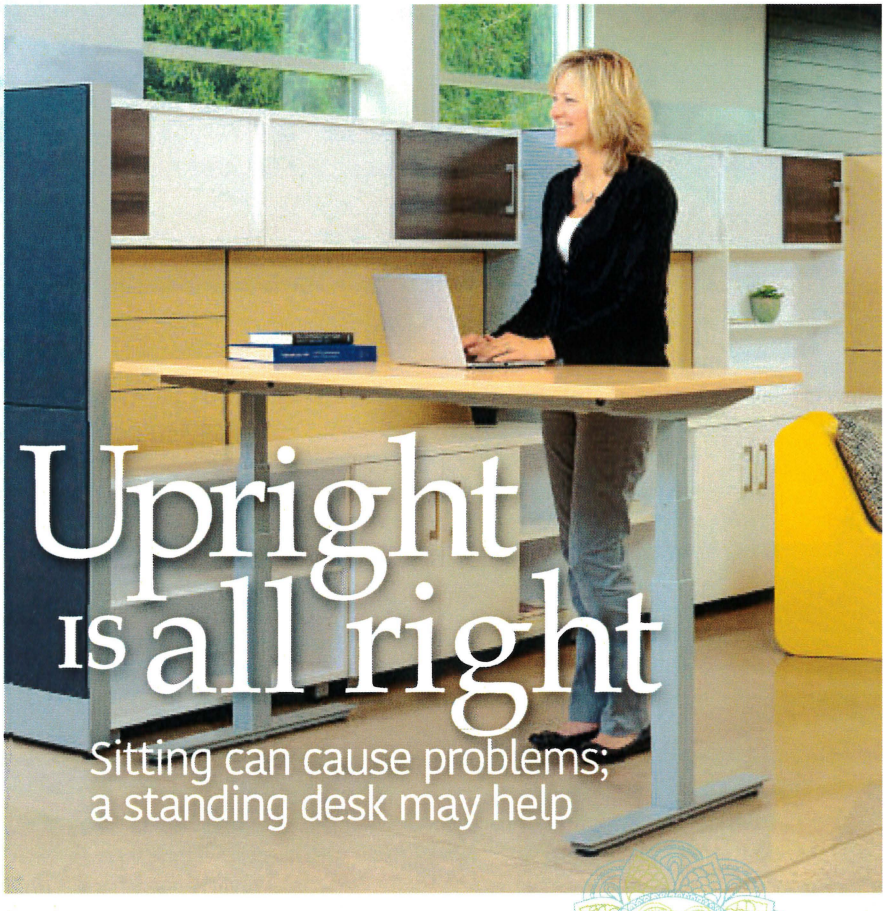

Upright is all right

Sitting can cause problems; a standing desk may help

TRENDWAY

BY TERESA MEEK

"BY TOO MUCH sitting still, the body becomes unhealthy; and soon the mind," wrote poet Henry Wadsworth Longfellow.

His words, written in the 19th century, ring truer than ever today. Study after study confirms that sitting isn't just not good for you—it's bad. *Seriously* bad.

Too much sitting increases your risk for heart disease and stroke, according to the American Heart Association (AHA; *heart.org*). It's linked to obesity and metabolic syndrome, a cluster of symptoms that includes high blood pressure, belly fat and abnormal cholesterol levels, says the Mayo Clinic (*mayoclinic.org*).

A study cited by the American Diabetes Association (*diabetes.org*) found that a sedentary lifestyle increases the risk of developing Type 2 diabetes by 91 percent.

It gets worse. Sitting is associated with colon cancer, muscle degeneration, poor circulation in legs, soft bones, herniated disks and "foggy brain," experts say.

"Sitting is just not good for us, and our sedentary time has increased over the decades," says Dr. Mary Ann Bauman, a spokesperson for the AHA. In 1965, average sedentary time was 26 hours a week. By 2009, it had increased to 38 hours. Today, between home and work, the average office worker spends 10 hours sitting each day.

Surprisingly, exercise alone doesn't solve the problem of sitting too long. "We sometimes think we can sit all day and go to the gym and we've solved our issue, but it's not enough," Bauman says. "You don't eliminate all the risks by exercising."

If you're stuck working at a desk all day, make a point of getting up and moving or stretching. You might start by simply standing rather than sitting whenever you have the chance, Mayo Clinic doctors suggest.

Even small movements help the body break down fats and sugars and can lead to weight loss and increased energy. According to an article in the *British Journal of Sports Medicine* (*bjsm.bmj.com*), desk-based workers should aim for two to four hours a day of light physical activity or standing, such as at an adjustable-height desk.

Costco member Dan Tarara, department chair of exercise science at High Point University, in High Point, North Carolina, has used a standing desk for over two years. "I absolutely love my standing desk," he says. "I feel like I have more energy and my productivity is better." The desk has also relieved tension in his upper back and a crick in his neck he used to get from sitting too long.

Though it's no substitute for exercise, a standing desk does help you burn a few extra calories and raises your metabolism somewhat, Tarara notes. It also improves concentration. "It helps increase the blood flow to your brain. It helps you have a little more mental energy and focus, particularly in the afternoon, after lunch," he says.

How much time should you spend standing? Some researchers have developed protocols, like eight minutes of standing and two minutes of moving around for every half hour of sitting. Do what works best for you, advises Tarara. He spends 90 percent of his workday standing. A colleague uses the "up" position on her standing desk for two or three hours, and that's enough to energize her.

Standing desks aren't for everyone. If you have arthritis in your knees or hips, you may not be able to tolerate standing for long periods. If you have plantar fasciitis (inflamed tissue on the bottom of your foot) or bone spurs in your feet, standing may exacerbate your symptoms. But for people who don't have those conditions, standing desks are a great option.

Adam Broetje, a Costco member and CEO of digital marketing agency Odd Dog Media, bought standing desks for his five employees after reading about the evils of sitting. "They've been incredible. It's something I wish we had done years ago," he says.

Employees say they get an energy boost and focus better, particularly during the post-lunch lag. Seeing co-workers raise or lower desks reminds others to do the same.

Standing helps Broetje concentrate on "mind-numbing" documents like legal contracts. "The simple act of raising the desk allows me to focus and get more done. When you stand up, it's like a fresh start," he says. **C**

Teresa Meek is a Seattle-area writer.

Get up! Simple ways to increase your movement at work

- Set a timer on your computer (or Fitbit) to remind you to get up and stretch or walk for a few minutes every hour.
- Coffee breaks aren't just for coffee. Make a point of circumnavigating the office or, better yet, the building.
- Suggest standing meetings. Bonus: They tend to be shorter.
- Periodically swap your chair for an exercise ball, which allows for more movement.—*TM*

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Costco members will find a variety of adjustable-height standing desks year-round on Costco.com and seasonally at Costco locations.