



## SIT, STAND, STAY AWAKE... AT YOUR OWN RISK

An increasing number of executives are suffering from ailments directly linked to workplace profiles and pressures  
By CHITRA NARAYANAN

### Sedentary jobs: bane of our lives

If you have a job that keeps you glued to the desk, pay heed: From your eyes to your feet, every single part of your body is at risk. Staring at the computer for a long duration can affect your vision. Sitting and working at your desk can cause a wide range of musculoskeletal disorders. The sedentary habit can lead to life-threatening lifestyle diseases, from cardiac problems to diabetes.

Being sedentary is the leading cause of obesity (now recognized as a major disease itself), and desk-bound people are also at double the risk of deep vein thrombosis or DVT (see 'SLURF' below). A study published in the *European Journal of Cancer Prevention* also reports that desk-bound men are at higher risk of prostate cancer, for the first time linking a form of cancer with inactivity levels.

#### Mitigate damage

- Take frequent breaks to move about, or at least stretch
- Counteract long spells at the desk by being active after hours. Exercise for at least an hour a day
- Make sure your workplace is ergonomically designed.

### Night shifts: burning the candle at both ends

Compromised safety (while commuting) and several occupational health risks—night-shift workers face a double whammy, according to Shivani Sachdev, gynaecologist and infertility expert, Phoenix Hospital, New Delhi, a study by the World Health Organization, or



WHO, has shown that women who work for long durations on night shifts have a 48% higher chance of contracting breast cancer. They suffer from abnormally low secretion of the sleep hormone melatonin, which also has a protective effect against cancer. So much so that the Danish government has offered compensation to women who may be affected by such a lifestyle. About 40 women have already been given such compensation. In addition, studies show that women on night shifts face other risks such as low-weight babies and longer pregnancies.

Other problems that night-shift workers face: sleep apnea, digestive disorders, stress,

relationship problems. According to Samir Parikh, head of department, mental health, Max Healthcare, New Delhi, the tendency to smoke and use alcohol is also higher among shift workers.

#### Mitigate damage

- Avoid night shifts over long durations; rotate shifts
- Make a special effort to regulate diet and exercise
- Avoid alcohol and tobacco
- Given the safety risks associated with commuting at night, urge employers to have overnighting/sleeping facilities at the workplace (old-timers recall how women telephone operators, in the pre-STD days when trunk calls were the norm, had dorming arrangements in Delhi's telephone exchanges. Nurses and lady doctors often sleep over at hospitals after night duty as well.)

### On your feet: standing risks

Professions that keep you on your feet for long periods (the retail sector, airlines, modelling, acting, lab technicians and scientists) can lead to varicose veins: "In this a person experiences gradual onset of swelling, pain, discolouration and bluish dilated veins, which can eventually break down, causing bleeding or wounds that fail to heal," says B.C. Sathyanarayan of Max Balaji Hospital.

#### Mitigate damage

- Increase the length and frequency of break periods
- Avoid floors that are too hard or too soft
- Choose appropriate footwear for work
- Ankle exercises are proven to prevent varicose veins
- Don't stand still; just keep walking

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