

# Standing at Work Can be Detrimental to Blood Pressure

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*A Finnish study found that prolonged standing at work had a negative impact on the research participants' 24-hour blood pressure. In contrast, spending more time sitting at work was associated with better blood pressure. The study suggests that activity behaviour during working hours may be more relevant to 24-hour blood pressure than recreational physical activity.*

Regular exercise is important for controlling blood pressure. In particular, more vigorous, aerobic exercise is effective for lowering blood pressure, but also everyday physical activity can have a beneficial impact. Previous studies have shown that exercise in leisure time is more beneficial for the cardiovascular system than physical activity at work, which can even be detrimental to health.

## 24-hour Blood Pressure Important for Cardiovascular Health

In the Finnish Retirement and Aging study (FIREA) conducted at the University of Turku, the physical activity of municipal employees approaching retirement age was measured using thigh-worn accelerometers during working hours, leisure time, and days off. In addition, the research participants used a portable blood pressure monitor that automatically measured their blood pressure every 30 minutes for 24 hours.

“Rather than any single measurement, 24-hour blood pressure is a better indication of how blood pressure stresses the heart and blood vessels throughout the day and night. If blood pressure is slightly high throughout the day and does not fall sufficiently even at night, blood vessels start to stiffen and the heart has to work harder to cope with the increased pressure. Over the years, this can lead to the development of cardiovascular disease,” says Doctoral Researcher Jooa Norha.

## Take a Break from Standing During the Work Day

The latest results confirm previous findings that physical activity at work can be harmful to the heart and circulatory system. In particular, prolonged standing can raise blood pressure as the body boosts circulation to the lower limbs by constricting blood vessels and increasing the pumping power of the heart.

“A standing desk can provide a nice change from sitting at the office, but too much standing can be harmful. It’s a good idea to take a break from standing during the work day, either by walking every half an hour or sitting for some parts of the day,” Norha recommends.

## Recreational Physical Activity Is Also Needed

In addition, the results of the study suggest that sedentary work in itself is not necessarily harmful to blood pressure. Instead, researchers stress the importance of recreational physical activity for both office and construction workers.

“It is good to remember that being physically active at work is not enough on its own. Engaging in diverse physical exercise during leisure time helps to maintain fitness, making work-related strain more manageable. Similarly, employees with predominantly sedentary jobs should ensure that they get enough exercise during their leisure time,” Norha highlights.

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