

Why I stand at work (and have a bigger butt because of it)



Being a pathologist in private practice means a lot of long days at the microscope. Most of us have jobs that require prolonged sitting, and that takes a toll on our bodies. I'm not just talking about our waistlines, but the effects of prolonged sitting are so detrimental, that it can result in excessive lumbar curvature (lordosis), low back and hip pain, and gluteal atrophy.

Yes, you heard me right. Gluteal atrophy, or as I like to call it, vanishing butt syndrome. Unless you have a Kim Kardashian butt, my guess is you don't want to lose whatever nice curves you've got back there. But if you are sitting down for hours at a time every day, most likely some of your butt cells are starting to wither away. And if there is one thing I know well, it's cells. (You thought I was going to say butts, didn't you?)

Not only does your butt slowly atrophy from prolonged sitting, but other muscles are affected too. The mechanism by which this occurs is pretty well known in exercise science. Prolonged sitting causes a tightening of your hip flexors, which in turn anteriorly rotates your pelvis causing the low back to curve unnaturally. This position of the pelvis also results in the hamstrings being lengthened, which by autonomic inhibition, results in decreased firing of the nerves to the muscle fibers to prevent injury. Basically, your whole lower body becomes unbalanced. If you have ever done leg extensions and hamstring curls in the gym, you'll notice quite a

difference in how strong the front and back of your legs are as a result of prolonged sitting and muscle imbalance.

In the sitting position, your gluteal muscles are completely inactive. Muscular inactivity has a whole host of negative effects, from the obvious atrophy and cosmetic appearance, to metabolic derangements that lead to a high likelihood of developing chronic illness. Combine prolonged sitting with the typical work stress most of us face, and sitting becomes downright dangerous to our health.

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So what is the solution? Luckily, there are several. The one I adopted, and which I would recommend, is to create a standing workstation. While there are companies that manufacture specialized standing workstations (as well as treadmill desks), it might be difficult to get this approved by your boss. I ended up buying fifteen dollar wooden shoe racks that I assembled myself, and placed these on top of my already existing desk to create a comfortable workspace.



If that doesn't seem plausible in your situation, then just make sure you are getting up and walking around frequently, at least every hour. You want to activate those glutes, get your blood flowing, and break up the monotony of prolonged sitting. Better yet, run some stairs, do some pushups or get a round of squats in. The more movement you incorporate on an hourly basis, the better. Studies show that even regular exercise in off-work hours is still not enough to counteract the effects of prolonged sitting.

Butt health is an extremely important topic. If there is one muscle group you want to keep firm and strong throughout your life, focus on your derriere. Your return on investment will not only ensure you never fall prey to vanishing butt syndrome, but that you also enjoy better health overall.
