

Study finds using a treadmill while working can boost employee productivity

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Walking while you work may not only improve an employee's health, it may also boost productivity, according to new research from the University of Minnesota just published in *PLOS ONE*.

Carlson School of Management professor of Work and Organizations Avner Ben-Ner and his coauthors studied employees using treadmills instead of office chairs as they work. The subjects were 40 employees of a Twin Cities financial services company. Their offices were refitted to have a computer, phone, and writing space on a desk in front of a treadmill to be operated by the employee at up to two mph. The walkers were studied for one year and data on [performance](#) and work-related activities and events were collected through surveys of the walkers and their supervisors. Additionally, each walker was given an [energy expenditure](#) monitoring device a month before their treadmills were installed. These devices were to be worn continuously during waking hours.

The results of the study were encouraging – the treadmills had a significantly favorable impact on both physical activity and work performance. As would be expected, walkers were burning more calories than before the study began – by about 7 to 8 percent a day. "It's not a lot, but if you take a sedentary office worker and you spread it around the day, that's a good outcome," Ben-Ner says.

'Substantial Increase' in Productivity Observed

More interesting is the marked increase in [worker productivity](#). After an initial decline as employees learned how to adjust to walking while working on their tasks, productivity went up. Production measures were derived from employee and supervisor surveys of quantity of performance, quality of performance, and quality of interaction with co-workers. An overall performance measure was on a 10-point scale.

"For the duration of the study, productivity increased by close to a point," Ben-Ner says. "That's a substantial increase." Ben-Ner calls the outcome of the study a win-win situation. "It's a health-improving option that costs very little. I think there will be an increasing number of employers who will invest \$1,000 or \$2,000 in outfitting a persons' workstation," he says. "The employer benefits from the employee being active and healthy and more smart because more blood is flowing to the brain."

Ben-Ner suggests that future research could examine various circumstances that could affect employee performance. It may be that less physically fit employees or those who have more cognitively complex tasks may gain relatively more from the use treadmill workstations. Generational difference among [employees](#) also may play a role.

"I'm willing to bet my hat and my boots too that millennials will be more open to something like this because they grew up and came of age in a time concerning these types of things," he says. "It will be easier than trying to break in someone who is 50 years old and a lifelong sedentary person and get them to start walking."

Provided by University of Minnesota

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