

Iowa State University Releases Preliminary Findings from "Walking While Working" Study

Written by Movement Revolution to Restore Health
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Summary: Iowa has set a goal to become the healthiest state in the nation in the next five years. Scientists at Iowa State are helping to lead the charge by promoting an "Exercise is Medicine" campaign designed to educate Americans about the health benefits of exercise. The challenge is implementing solutions that initiate movement into the work and home environment. Iowa State's Nutrition and Wellness Research Center has launched the largest study yet which will involve more than 1500 students and faculty members using an innovative tool that promotes movement: the TrekDesk Treadmill Desks. The Center has just recently reported preliminary findings on the first phase of this research.

Physical inactivity may be America's largest public health nemesis, contributing to a myriad of chronic diseases including obesity, heart disease, stroke, diabetes, hypertension, cancer, depression and anxiety, arthritis, and osteoporosis. Since the average American walks less than half the amount of steps necessary to maintain health and prevent disease, a major challenge is getting office workers and students moving in an increasingly sedentary work environment. Researchers at Iowa State University have just released preliminary findings of a large scale study designed to test the merits of one potential solution: TrekDesk treadmill desks.

The research project is coordinated by a team at Iowa State's Nutrition and Wellness Research Center (NWRC) led by Dr. Greg Welk, Director of Clinical Research and Community Outreach. The team launched a campus wide campaign to promote interest and involvement in physical activity and a key part of their programming involved re-engineering work/ study environments with the use of TrekDesk Treadmill Desks combined with Lifespan treadmills provided by 2nd Wind.

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"We have TrekDesks in use at numerous universities across the country", stated TrekDesk CEO Steve Bordley, "many are conducting studies on a variety of health and productivity issues, however the scale of the Iowa State study, when completed, will be larger than all of the other studies combined. I think that shows extraordinary leadership and commitment to their goal of educating America about its current health challenges and offering life changing information and solutions."

The TrekDesk study is part of Iowa State's commitment to the national "Exercise is Medicine" campaign, an effort coordinated by the American College of Sports Medicine and other leading health and fitness organizations to educate the public and medical professionals about the need to view exercise as a vital sign.

The NWRC created a plan that enables the TrekDesks to be piloted in departments and office units across campus. Dr. Welk commented, "Our staff have really enjoyed the opportunities to use the TrekDesks in our facility so we worked out a way to promote shared use across campus." Over 35 other office groups are in line to participate in the three phased testing process. "The interest has been incredible", Dr. Welk said. "We have a waiting list through April of next year which indicates that people are really interested in ways of being more active at work."

Logging the use of the TrekDesks over specific time intervals, Dr. Welk and his team has focused the study on evaluating patterns and perceptions of use as well as overall satisfaction with the concept of walking while working. Their hope initially is to gain an insight into how to effectively introduce physical activity and at what intervals into the workplace for maximum health benefits.

The study has completed two waves and is currently in the third wave. The first two waves covered the following departments and offices: Office of the Vice President for Research and Economic Development, College of Human Sciences Dean's Office, Kinesiology, President's Office, Administrative Services, Sociology, College of Design and Chemistry.

Approximately 82% of survey respondents indicated that they would recommend the TrekDesk and 73% agreed that the university should consider getting TrekDesks for their employees. It should be noted that the TrekDesks were placed in common areas of the offices so that many individuals could have access during the day as opposed to specific offices. Some specific findings are highlighted below:

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- Frequency of use: The majority of survey respondents (57%) used the TrekDesk Treadmill Desks for 15-30 minute sessions. Approximately 27% used it for 30 minutes to an hour while an equal amount (8%) either used it for less than 15 minutes or for an hour or more.
- Longevity: Over the initial 30 day test phase, 58% of the respondents reported that their use of the TrekDesk either increased in duration or stayed the same while 42% experienced a decrease in use over this time frame.
- Ease of Use: A majority of respondents rated typical office duties ranging from typing, writing, and talking on the phone as easily accomplished tasks.
- Overall Feelings: Respondents reported generally positive feelings after use (e.g. increased energy) and few negative side-effects (e.g. tiredness, , nausea and light-headedness).

The promotion of physical activity at work may help to counter the impact of sedentary jobs and lifestyles in our society. During the 1960's approximately 11% of Americans were overweight but that number is teetering close to 70% today. At an estimated annual cost of \$150 billion annually obesity is recognized as public enemy number one (contributing to more than 58 chronic diseases including the nation's top three killers: heart disease, stroke and cancer).

"The obesity epidemic gets considerable attention in society but the real problem is an epidemic of inactivity" says Dr. Welk. "People have emphasized losing weight but many health problems can be drastically reduced by increasing levels of physical activity and minimizing sedentary time". The study at Iowa State University demonstrates an interest in more active workstations and work environments. "There is clearly no silver bullet but efforts to promote more physical activity at work are certainly part of the solution."

For More Information:

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