

LIVE Healthy

→ Women with very stressful jobs are more likely to get serious health problems. Time to find your Zen!

Your Body on the Clock

A modern girl's guide to dodging the sneaky health hazards lurking at the office.

By JENNY EVERETT

→ NEXT TIME YOU PLOP down at your desk, consider the ways your office space—where you'll be spending the next eight-plus hours—might impact your body. "When you think about it, it's frightening how little we know about how our work environments affect us," says Carolyn Rickard-Brideau, an architect in Arlington, Va., who studies the link between design and human health. Everything from energy-efficient lighting to open floor plans has the potential to mess with your well-being. Here, leading experts highlight six dangers of the 21st-century office job and pitch their best tips to help you work smarter and feel better at the end of a (very) long day.

HAZARD
Fluorescent lighting

As incandescent bulbs go the way of the fax machine, CFLs are becoming an office fixture. Although they're certainly greener, they can be meaner when it comes to your skin: A study done at the State University of New York at Stony Brook found that tiny cracks in CFL coatings allow the bulbs to emit UVC rays, which can damage epidermal cells at close range. In other words, overhead fluorescents are A-OK, but you should rethink your desk lamp. "Sitting within 2 feet of this type of bulb for lengthy periods could be harmful," says lead study author Miriam Rafailovich, PhD. **WORK WELL** Brighten your space with an LED light,

OFFICE RUMOR
"Fluorescent lighting causes migraines."
Well, not exactly. If you're prone to these awful head pounders, any light can trigger the pain, which is why resting in a dark room may bring some relief.

like the Trademark Global Lavish Lamp (\$30; at Target), which poses no health risk, says Rafailovich.

HAZARD
Working nonstop

While budget-cutting corporations squeeze more and more from their employees, it's not

surprising that nine-to-fivers (read: nine-to-niners) are more stressed than ever. But women seem to have it worse. Twenty percent of us report that our stress level is above an 8 (out of 10), compared with 16 percent of men, according to the American Psychological Association. And 43 percent of women say their stress is on the rise. That kind of chronic stress raises heart rate, blood pressure and levels of inflammation—all risk factors for heart disease, says Suzanne Steinbaum, DO, director of women's heart health at Lenox Hill Hospital in New York City.

WORK WELL Hit the water cooler. Walk a lap around the floor. Pee often! Worker bees who take short, frequent breaks experience less emotional exhaustion, more job satisfaction and fewer aches and pains than those who don't, according to 2015 research from Baylor University in Waco, Texas. Can't find time to press pause? Suggest moving one of your meetings outdoors. Studies have shown that simply being in nature lowers blood pressure and levels of fight-or-flight hormones.

HAZARD
Lack of privacy

Silicon Valley-inspired open floor plans are meant to encourage collaboration. But they also tend to generate a steady hum of distractions, as chatter, rings and pings travel freely through the airy space. One 2014 study found that workers lost up to 86 minutes of productivity a day due to various

→ Got a window seat? Don't forget SPF—most glass lets in UVA light.



SHAWN KLAUS/VEP/GETTY IMAGES

interruptions. “Every time you’re disturbed, you must not only let go of the distraction but then reconnect with the original subject of attention,” explains John Weaver, PsyD, a psychologist in Waukesha, Wis. This process just adds extra stress to your day.

WORK WELL See if you can expense some noise-cancelling headphones. Bose’s QuietComfort 20 model (\$250; bose.com) has an in-ear design, so you can drown out the din without messing up your perfectly tousled bun. No dice? Take a breather in a quiet spot with a pretty view whenever you hit a wall, suggests Rickard-Brideau. “Thanks to a phenomenon called unconscious processing, your brain will keep working on a problem even though it’s no longer in front of you,” she explains. Expect a breakthrough on the way back to your chair.

HAZARD
Beaucoup screen time

On average, we spend more than half our waking hours staring at electronic devices—a habit that can affect more than your neck. A 2014 Japanese study found that office workers who were parked in front of a computer for most of the day experienced a reduction in their tear fluid, a typical symptom of dry eye. (Ouch.) This is partly because we tend to blink less when we gaze at a screen. Poorly lubricated peepers can lead to strain, irritation and blurry vision.

WORK WELL Optometrists recommend giving your eyes regular breaks—which

How to Meditate While Pretending to Work

Follow this simple five-step technique, courtesy of hypnotherapist and self-help expert John McGrail, PhD, to de-stress without ever leaving your desk.

- 1 Sit quietly and breathe deeply. (If the boss is out, feel free to close your eyes.)
- 2 Conjure a time when you felt really confident and powerful, and stay focused on that memory until the feeling returns.
- 3 Press your left thumb and forefinger together, gently squeezing until the memory fades.
- 4 Repeat the exercise, this time using a memory of an occasion when you felt serene and peaceful. Then do it again with a memory of feeling unconditionally loved.
- 5 Practice this exercise daily for a week. After that, just squeezing your fingers will trigger positive, “I can handle this” vibes.



↑ To avoid neck strain, keep your screen no farther away than arm's length.

allows them to recoup that natural lubrication—by following the 20-20-20 rule: Every 20 minutes, gaze at something 20 feet away for 20 seconds.

HAZARD
Slouching

American workers maintain good posture for a little more than a third of their workday, studies show. The rest of the time, let’s just say we’re not sitting pretty. “Aside from back pain, slouching causes a slowdown in digestion and circulation,” says Brad Thomas, MD, founding partner of Beach Cities Orthopedics in Manhattan Beach, Calif. It can even affect your mental state. A study in *Health Psychology* found that people who slumped while working under pressure had more negative thoughts than those who sat up straight.

WORK WELL Check yourself. Is your butt in the back of your chair? Feet on the floor? (A lumbar support or foot stool might help.) Can you type without changing your posture? Good. If

you’ll need reminders to stay this way, try the Lumo Lift (\$80; lumobodytech.com), a personal tracker that vibrates every time you hunch.

HAZARD
The kitchen

When you grab a juice from the pantry, you may pick up more than kale-beet. Researchers at the University of Arizona found that an employee sick with a cold, the flu or a stomach bug will likely contaminate the fridge door, microwave and coffee pot within two hours!

WORK WELL Alcohol-based hand sanitizers can quickly kill a lot of bacteria, but they aren’t as effective as good old soap and water when it comes to knocking out viruses. And when you wash your hands, don’t rush it: A thorough job—including rubbing hands together vigorously to jar all those germs loose—should take a solid 20 to 30 seconds. ■

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