

“STOP: Take A Break- A Safe Ergonomics Practice”: Is it a Challenge or Opportunity for Indian Office Workers?

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Editorial

Musculoskeletal disorders (MSDs) is the second most non-fatal disabilities after mental health, according to the outcome of the Global Burden of Disease Study, 2013 [1]. On other hand, epidemiological studies have shown that the spectrum of MSDs in developing countries is similar to that seen in industrialized countries, but the burden of disease tends to be higher due to a delay in diagnosis or lack of access to adequate health-care facilities for effective treatment. In perspective of public health, MSDs is a preventable disorder which is evidenced by various health promotion models [2]. Whilst the biomechanical causes of MSD are debatable; the possible mechanism found to be over use

Rest is a key component in ensuring the performance of the musculoskeletal system. Frequent breaks can decrease the duration of a task and help lower the exposure to ergonomic injury risk [3]. The question of rest breaks and the determination of their duration and scheduling has long been a focus of ergonomic studies in various industries [4]. Different studies concluded that "After adjusting for age and gender, the most significant factor associated with symptoms of MSDs are, length of time the subjects do the repetitive work during the week (highly correlated with the length of time spent without a break)". There are many theories recommending that frequent brief relaxation breaks [micro-pauses] are useful. It may also explain the basis for normal physiological fatigue, aches and pains associated with work, which resolves with rest.

Micro-pause (5-15 seconds every 10 min for relaxation exercises) as well as Macro-pause (5 min every hour for stretching exercises); both are equally important and recommended within the work schedule by various researches and International bodies. Unfortunately, Indian

workers are not good at regulating their own breaks. If not reminded, it is unlikely to take a break at the optimum time unless significant fatigue has accumulated and once discomfort has arisen. Here, there are two schools of thoughts; "rest breaks were not regulated effectively by users if left entirely to their discretion" and on other hand "scheduled breaks were found to be generally more effective than allowing the worker to take breaks on their own". Now, it's a great challenge for policy makers to decide either micro-break is matter of concern of employer or employee [5]. This concept is deathly observed in Indian office workers within the work schedule. Keeping in mind to the rapid increase in number of computer users, risk of repetitive motion & MSDs; there is an urgent need for developing a policy guideline at national level for Indian Office workers.

To conclude, micro-break is an essential and beneficial preventive measure for MSDs and should be adapted to Indian office workers. There is an urgent need for future research and policy formulation on the same, especially to Indian context.

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