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# Health Challenges in Evolving Offices

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Newspapers, of late, have been highlighting the increasing health problems faced by workers in the new age office.

The problems range from back pain, shoulder pain, wrist pain etc and intensity ranges from acute to repeated attacks ... leading to lowering of productivity of employees at work and deterioration in their personal lives.

While raising awareness among employees may be the first step forward; doing a deeper root-cause analysis and finding constructive and individually actionable solutions is the need of the hour.

Wellness@work is a Godrej Interio initiative committed to helping improve the health of employees in modern workspaces.

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### **Understanding changes in work patterns and office spaces of today**

Godrej Interio team of designers and ergonomists have been researching the evolving work patterns in offices to better understand the changes in work patterns and their impact on design of furniture.

Organizations have not taken enough steps to provide appropriately designed work areas / furniture / seating OR train employees on how to use & integrate these new tools of work into their work styles, without impacting their personal health & well being.

The research conducted across – companies and over – months shows a considerable change in work cultures and styles. Workspaces have become fluid, as work and business meetings are increasingly being conducted across physical boundaries. The growing affordability and use of technological work tools like Personal Computers, Laptops, I pads, Tablets, Webex and Smartphones has supported this change in work cultures and styles.

While employees have been quick to adopt these new work tools, the organizations have not taken enough steps to provide appropriately designed work areas / furniture / seating OR train the employees on how to use and integrate these new tools of work into their work styles without impacting their personal health and well being.

The extended working hours being put in by the employees in such an inappropriate working environment coupled with the lack of physical exercise has had a deadly impact on the overall productivity and health of employees.



### Assessing the changes in health of employees in evolving offices

To understand the impact of each of these probable causative factors, the Godrej Interio Ergonomics Cell team conducted an in-depth survey & observation study of working infrastructure and work posture habits of more than 100 employees over a span of 3 months at multiple locations, in various organizations.

The results of the research have revealed the following results with regard to intense levels of discomfort among employees and throws light on the probable causes of this pain / discomfort:

#### Survey\* of the employees revealed following details:

- ~71% employees confirmed to be suffering from pain / discomfort during working
- Incidence of pain / discomfort in specific areas was as below:
  - Lower back (36%)
  - **Upper back, Neck & Shoulders (62%)**
  - Eyes (37%)
  - Wrist (31%)
  - Lower Leg (15%)
- 90% of employees reported pain to be lingering on for more than 1 year
- Only 18% employees exercised on a regular basis, and another 10% exercised once a week.
- Average continuous seating on the chair, while at work in office, is 2.3~2.5 hours
- ~95% employees in the organization were not given any training on the importance of ergonomics & maintaining proper arrangement of their working area to adopt a healthy working posture.

\* All Survey data included in this White Paper is based on research conducted by Godrej Interio Ergonomics Cell team. The research was an in-depth survey & observation study of working infrastructure and work posture habits of more than 100 employees, over a span of 3 months at multiple corporate locations. The survey covered various work profiles like HR, Operations, Sales, Finance, IT, Back-office support functions, Administration & Facility & Top Management.

#### CAUSE FOR CONCERN

Survey shows a 62% incidence of pain / discomfort in Upper back, Neck and Shoulders among office employees and the pain is lingering for more than a year.

Observation study\* of employee’s working infrastructure and work posture:



- 72% employees were seated without getting proper lower lumbar support
- 84% employees were seated without getting proper upper back support
- 86% of employees kept their feet tucked on the revolving base of the chair
- 74% of employees were not getting proper elbow support while working
- 84% of employees were observed working across the midline of the body
- 87% employees were observed with neck bent forward while working on their computers / laptops.

**The survey findings and the observation study details were collaborated and following conclusions could be derived:**

The mismatch & non-integration of work tools with the furniture is one of key causative factors leading to lingering pain / discomfort among employees.

Pain & Discomfort as per survey	Cause of pain / discomfort identified through observation study
Lower back	Employees not getting proper lumbar support in chair
Upper back & Neck & Shoulder	Neck bent forward while working, Chair back size small – no upper back support, High incidence of working across midline of body
Wrist	Chair height inappropriately adjusted. Armrest not supporting users elbow while working
Eyes	Users looking at the work-screens for a period beyond 2 hours at a stretch.
Lower leg	Feet tucked on the revolving base of the chair

The pain / discomfort highlighted by the employees, if un-attended or avoided can lead to a chronic physiological problem described in medical terms as MSD or Musculoskeletal Disorders.



## ORGANISATIONS NEED TO BE ON THE ALERT

These complaints of pain / discomfort from the employees are the early warning indicators for the management that the office space is not as healthy / ergonomic as required and they need to intervene and take the appropriate corrective steps in time.

Along with investing in the latest work tools to increase the connectivity / productivity of their employees, adequate steps also need to be taken to make them aware of the right ways to integrate these work tools so that the employee health is not put to risk.

A well-structured engagement program focused on “Employee Wellness” can help organizations achieve the benefit of new work tools along with sustaining a healthy work force, thereby creating a positive mindset among employees towards the organization.

For any further input on this White Paper, please feel free to get in touch with our Ergonomics Cell at [wellness@godrej.com](mailto:wellness@godrej.com) or call us on +91 22 6796 2467 / 2468 / 3421.