Exercise Ball in the Office: Trick or Treat?

Exercise balls (stability balls) have made their way from the gym to the office. You may have seen coworkers sitting on them or maybe the thought of trying one has crossed your mind. Maintaining balance when sitting and working on an exercise ball requires the user to engage his or her core, so it sounds like a no-brainer decision to use them. But, does the research back up the positive claims encouraging the use of exercise balls in the office?

Claim #1: It strengthens your core and improves posture.

- There is little to no differences in muscle activity when sitting on an exercise ball compared to an office chair.
- No improvements in strength nor posture have been reported.
- Prolonged sitting on an exercise ball leads to greater spinal compression, meaning your lower back is under greater stress compared to sitting on an office chair.

Claim #2: It reduces back pain.

- There is no empirical evidence that it reduces back pain.
- The use of an exercise ball has been shown to increase lower and upper back discomfort.
- The greater contact area leads to more soft tissue compression, which can result in poor lower limb circulation, soreness, and numbness.

Claim #3: It increases caloric expenditure.

- There is a low to moderate increase in caloric expenditure, a difference of only 30 to 60 calories for an 8-hour workday.

Based on these findings, the absence of back support and arm rests can increase the risk of the user developing a musculoskeletal disorder.

OCTOBER IS FIRE PREVENTION MONTH

This year’s FPW campaign, “Look. Listen. Learn. Be aware. Fire can happen anywhere,” works to educate people about three basic but essential steps to take to reduce the likelihood of having a fire—and how to escape safely in the event of one:

LOOK - Look for places fire could start. Take a good look around your home. Identify potential fire hazards and take care of them.

LISTEN - Listen for the sound of the smoke alarm. You could have only minutes to escape safely once the smoke alarm sounds. Go to your outside meeting place, which should be a safe distance from the home and where everyone should know to meet.

LEARN - Learn two ways out of every room and make sure all doors and windows leading outside open easily and are free of clutter.
Are you getting enough sleep?

Although it’s recommended that adults get seven to nine hours of sleep a night, NIOSH notes that multiple factors may contribute to workers being sleep-deprived. These include shift work, work hours, job stress and physically demanding work.

“Additionally, societal factors such as round-the-clock access to technology and the pressure to work harder has increased work hours, and thus also led to an increase of short sleep among U.S. adults,” NIOSH states. So what can workers do to get better sleep?

Six tips for better rest

Although you may not be able to control all of the factors that hinder a good night’s sleep, the Mayo Clinic recommends adopting certain habits that may help you get better rest:

1. Follow a sleep schedule. Do your best to go to bed at the same time – including on weekends. Being consistent will help reinforce your sleep-wake cycle. If you can’t fall asleep after about 20 minutes, do something relaxing until you feel tired.
2. Be mindful of what you eat and drink. Don’t go to bed when you feel hungry or overly full. Avoid nicotine, caffeine and alcohol before bed.
3. Create a tranquil sleep environment. Keep your bedroom cool, dark and quiet. Avoid looking at light-emitting screens before bed, and consider using room-darkening shades, earplugs or a white noise machine to help you sleep.
4. Reconsider naps. Taking long naps during daylight hours can limit nighttime sleep, so if you must nap, limit it to 30 minutes or less. (However, if you work a night shift, you might need to take a nap before work to help make up for lost sleep.)
5. Stay active. Regular exercise can help promote better sleep, and spending time outside may be helpful, as well.
6. Try not to stress. If worries are keeping you awake, write them down and set them aside for the next day.

How to Avoid Slips, Trips and Falls What's at Stake

Slips happen when there’s not enough friction or traction between your feet (shoes) and the surface you’re walking or working on. Trips happen when your foot or lower leg hits an object and your upper body keeps on going, causing you to lose balance. Falls happen when you slip, or trip and you’re thrown too far off balance.

The danger is amped up because slip, trip, and fall hazards are found in just about every work environment you can think of.

Don’t Blow Away the Safety Hazards of Compressed Air

Compressed air is useful, but its power demands respect. Air pressure released close to someone’s ear can damage the ear drum. The same amount of pressure to the eyes can cause blindness. If air gets into the bloodstream through even the tiniest cut, it can make its way to the brain and cause permanent disability or death. Never use more pressure than you need and never direct compressed air at yourself or any other worker, for any reason.
7 Ways to Prevent Slips, Trips and Falls

1. Slow down - It's not a race, there is no prize for being first.
2. Watch out - Watch for hazards and report issues immediately.
3. Clothing is not optional - Wear well fitting clothing.
4. Keep your hands free - Keep your hands free when you walk, to help you catch your balance if you start to fall.
5. Move it - Don't leave equipment, tools or material out.
6. Keep it shut - Close drawers, cans, bottles and other containers to prevent contents from spilling creating hazards.
7. Stay alert - The chances for a accident are greater if you're distracted.

Things You Need to Know About Mold

Due to recent heavy rains and corresponding high river and water table levels in the Cedar Valley area, our homes may be inundated by water and high humidity levels. Such conditions often promote mold growth. In order to correctly respond to this potential problem, there is some information the Environmental Protection Agency believes you should know.

1. Potential health effects and symptoms associated with mold exposures include allergic reactions, asthma and other respiratory complaints.
2. There is no practical way to eliminate all mold and mold spores in the indoor environment; the way to control indoor mold growth is to control moisture.
3. If mold is a problem in your home or school, you must clean up the mold and eliminate sources of moisture.
4. Fix the source of the water problem or leak to prevent mold growth.
5. Reduce indoor humidity (to 30-60%) to decrease mold growth by: Venting bathrooms, dryers and other moisture-generating sources to the outside Using air conditioners and de-humidifiers Increasing ventilation Using exhaust fans whenever cooking, dishwashing and cleaning
6. Clean and dry any damp or wet building materials and furnishings within 24-48 hours to prevent mold growth.
7. Clean mold off hard surfaces with water and detergent, and dry completely. Absorbent materials such as ceiling tiles, that are moldy, may need to be replaced.
8. Prevent condensation: Reduce the potential for condensation on cold surfaces (i.e., windows, piping, exterior walls, roof, or floors) by adding insulation.
9. In areas where there is a perpetual moisture problem, do not install carpeting (i.e., by drinking fountains, by classroom sinks, or on concrete floors with leaks or frequent condensation).
10. Molds can be found almost anywhere; they can grow on virtually any substance, providing moisture is present. There are molds that can grow on wood, paper, carpet, and foods.

Additional information may be found on the EPA website at https://www.epa.gov/mold/learn-about-mold

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