

Treadmill workstation benefits employees, employers, study says

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Pictured is one of the treadmill workstations used in the study. Credit: UT Arlington

Employees who use treadmill workstations not only receive physical benefits but also are more productive at work, according to a recently published study by researchers from The University of Texas at Arlington, the Mayo Clinic and the University of Minnesota.

Darla Hamann, an assistant professor in the UT Arlington School of

Urban and Public Affairs, and four colleagues wrote "Treadmill Workstations: The Effects of Walking while Working on Physical Activity and Work Performance", which was published by the journal *PLoS One* Feb. 20.

In the study, sedentary [employees](#) from a nonprofit financial service company had their current cubicles and offices outfitted with treadmill desks. The desks could be raised and lowered with the push of a button, and the employees could choose to sit, stand or walk at their discretion. The employees were surveyed for 52 weeks, and wore an accelerometer that kept track of their daily calories burned.

When the employees had the treadmill workstation, they burned an average of 74 more calories per day than they did before they received the treadmill workstation.

"What's great about that is that employees who had the treadmill workstations became more productive in addition to becoming more active," Hamann said. "Walking on the treadmill didn't come at the expense of being a productive worker. Walking seemed to augment productivity."

Hamann worked with Avner Ben-Ner, a professor and economist in the University of Minnesota's Center for Human Resources and Labor Studies in the Carlson School of Management. He also is an affiliated professor in the UM Law School. Chimnay U. Manohar, a graduate student at the University of Minnesota, Gabriel Koepp and James Levine, who are with the Mayo Clinic, were also part of the team. Levine is a leading endocrinologist there. Koepp is a research analyst.

This team brought together faculty from a [public administration](#) program, a business school and an academic health center, and is an example of the multi-disciplinary scholarship encouraged by The

University of Texas at Arlington.

The study surveyed roughly 200 employees per week at a financial services company. Forty had treadmill desks. The elevated workstations allowed employees to walk up to 2 miles per hour while working at their computers.

"I think this paper could lead companies to offer treadmill workstations for their employees as part of wellness programs nationwide," Hamann said. "I think it could eventually become a well-being initiative as part of a cafeteria plan of benefits for employees."

David Coursey, director of the master's in Public Administration degree and an associate professor at UT Arlington, said companies often rely on new computers and other high-tech tools to improve employees' performance.

"Dr. Hamann's research is among the relatively few to remind us of the importance of employee health in increasing productivity," Coursey said.

In addition, Hamann said the research showed a carryover effect of exercise becoming a habit for employees choosing to use the treadmill workstation.

"It's like the treadmill workstation served as a reminder for future [physical activity](#)," Hamann said. "It reinforced the idea to exercise."

Hamann said obesity in the United States and other westernized countries has become an epidemic leading to heart disease, diabetes and a host of other maladies. A leading cause of the epidemic is that people are no longer active at work.

"Our thinking was what could a treadmill – even one operating a slow

speed – accomplish in the work environment?" Hamann said.

All of the employees spent most of the day on a computer. Most of the employees were sedentary. Most of the employees using the [treadmill](#) workstation were female. Most were married. And about a third were college educated.

More information: www.plosone.org/article/info%3Adoi%2F10.1371%2Fjournal.pone.0088620

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