When Hard Work Doesn't Mean Muscle

Most of us would agree with the general statement that our work environment has changed in the past 50 years—but we'd probably be thinking about computer use or longer work hours. A different change in the workplace has been tracked by a group of researchers looking for causes of our population's increase in obesity [1].

In 1960, at least moderate physical activity was required in nearly 50% of our jobs; now it's fewer than 20%. So more than 80% of us are inactive or engaging in only light activity (and in many cases computers are doing away with that).

Comparing that trend in occupational physical activity with adults' body weight changes led the researchers to conclude that less physical activity on our jobs has translated directly to calories that we're not burning (and weight that we're gaining).

Workplace inactivity isn't the sole factor in obesity, of course. But the research suggests that a focus only on what Americans do/don't do at home may be missing a big piece of the puzzle, and employers with workplace wellness initiatives are to be commended [2].

Taking a "booster break"—15 minutes of physical activity, meditation or some other health-promoting activity—is the advice of psychologist Wendell Taylor, who says that type of break can have positive effects not only on individuals but potentially on team morale and even organizational image [3]. His book on booster breaks argues that the whole concept of the work break should be rethought [4]. He recalls driving by a hospital and seeing staff smoking outside on their break, which made him "think about how break times were embedded in our culture with smoking and other health-compromising practices accepted as norm."

So take a break! (but make it the beneficial kind)

1 - PLoS One (Trends over 5 Decades in U.S. Occupation-Related Physical Activity and Their Associations with Obesity) - www.plosone.org/article/info%3Adoi%2F10.1371%2Fjournal.pone.0019657#abstract0


3 - Occupational Digest (Booster breaks at work enhance health and energy, and could ripple through organisations) - http://bps-occupational-digest.blogspot.com/2011/02/booster-breaks-at-work-enhance-health.html

4 - OHSInsider.com (Doctors Say Work Breaks As We Know Them Should End) - http://ohsinsider.com/do-diligence/doctors-say-work-breaks-as-we-know-them-should-end