

BRITISH WORKERS AT RISK OF DEVELOPING HEALTH PROBLEMS NOT SEEN SINCE THE INDUSTRIAL REVOLUTION

- **Poor office working environments are costing the economy £77 billion a year¹ in work-related sick days**
- **More than 90% of UK office workers who suffer health issues because of their work environment admit these aches and pains make their job more difficult²**
- **UK office workers are most worried about developing a hunchback, and suffering from vision problems and repetitive strain injury as a result of poor workstation set up²**
- **Bosses are not doing enough to prevent workplace health issues – more than 25% of employees have asked for their workstations to be improved and are still waiting for a resolution²**
- **The “Work Colleague of the Future” has been revealed, illustrating what office workers will look like in 20 years if radical changes are not made in the workplace²**

Health experts are warning that Britain's office workers could be left with hunched backs within 20 years – if radical changes to work environments aren't made.³

New research by healthy workspace solutions provider, Fellowes, has revealed that more than nine in ten British office workers are suffering from poor health due to their work environment, and as a result, find their job more difficult.²

With office workers spending on average six hours every day sitting behind a desk, over 90% are concerned this is too much time and 98% are worried that this could lead to health problems in the future, such as hunchbacks, headaches, becoming overweight and repetitive strain injury.²

UK office workers are already suffering from strained eyes (50%), sore backs (49%) and headaches (48%) as a direct result of their workspace. What's more, seven in ten workers are resorting to medication to manage these issues.²

To help employers identify potential health problems lurking in the workplace, Fellowes worked with Behavioural Futurist, William Higham and a panel of experts in ergonomics, occupational health and wellbeing at work, to investigate and research the effects workspace environments are having on office workers' health.

The resulting report – “The Work Colleague of the Future” – shows certain behaviours and problems that, if left unchecked, will leave the majority of office workers with permanently bent backs, and a huge range of other health problems by 2040.³

Based on the report, a life-size model called “Emma” has been created to illustrate how workstation set ups can lead to office workers physically and visually changing, to cope with the poor office environment. “Emma” has:³

- A **permanently bent back**, caused by sitting for hours in a bad position
- **Varicose veins** from poor blood flow
- A **rotund stomach** caused by sedentary working
- **Dry and red eyes** from long hours staring at the computer screen
- **Swollen wrists** and ankles from repetitive movement
- **Sallow skin** from years of artificial light
- **Red upper arms** due regular contact with laptop heat
- **Eczema** caused by stress
- **Hairy ears and nose, as well as a swollen nose**, because of poor air quality.

William Higham, Behavioural Futurist and author of the report said: “*The Work Colleague of the Future* report shows that employers and workers really need to act now and address the problem of poor workplace health.

“Unless we make radical changes to our working lives, such as moving more, addressing our posture at our desks, taking regular walking breaks or considering improving our workstation setup, our offices are going to make us very sick.

“As a result, workers in the future could suffer health problems as bad as those we thought we’d left behind in the Industrial Revolution.”

Despite workstation risk assessment being a legal requirement across Europe, research highlights that employers need to do more to support workers, as over a third of employees admit they have not been offered an assessment since starting their job.²

Of those, who have asked for their workstations to be improved, more than a quarter (28%) remain unresolved and a fifth (20%) say their bosses didn’t take their complaint seriously.²

Stephen Bowden, ergonomist and human factors expert, who contributed to the report added: “Over time, sitting at a desk all day is going to have profound effect on office workers’ health, both physically and psychologically.

“Steps should be taken to ensure normal everyday movements become part of the job. One way to get people moving and reducing the time they sit for is consider more ergonomic furniture in the workplace, such as sit stand desks. Sit stand desks can form part of an Ergonomics programme to help prevent workers suffering long-term chronic health conditions.

“Employers should consider supporting staff to increase their daily movement which may reduce the risk of long-term chronic conditions while supporting staff with productivity”

Watch William Higham explain “Emma’s” transformation:
www.fellowes.com/Emma

To find out more about “Emma” and the Work Colleague of the Future report visit www.fellowes.com/Emma

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Health conditions currently affecting workers:²

- Sore back - 49%
- Sore legs - 18%
- Sore ankle - 13%
- Stiff legs - 23%
- Swollen legs - 15%
- Strained eyes - 50%
- Headaches - 48%
- Sore bum - 23%
- Stiff neck - 45%
- Sore wrists - 30%

Health conditions workers are worried about:²

- Arthritis - 16%
- Varicose veins - 11%
- Getting a hunchback - 18%
- Rotund stomach - 11%
- Spindly legs - 7%
- Green tinged skin - 5%
- Red/dry eyes - 15%
- Vision problems - 32%
- Hairy ears and nose - 6%
- Persistent headaches/migraines - 26%
- Repetitive strain injury - 24%
- Lower levels of attention - 11%
- Poor memory - 18%
- Weight gain - 30%

NOTES TO EDITORS

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About 'The Work Colleague of the Future' Report

Fellowes worked with Behavioural Futurist William Higham, and a panel of experts in ergonomics, occupational health and wellbeing at work, to write 'The Work Colleague of the Future' report. The report looked at how the human body will change physically and visually in the long term if steps are not taken to address the

way we interact with our workstation by introducing ways to increase regular movement and improve our posture. To determine what these changes could be, William gathered research and information on these topics across France, Germany and the UK and made predictions about what 'The Work Colleague of the Future' may look like in 20 years' time. The report includes insights from British Ergonomist and Human Factors expert Stephen Bowden, French Author and owner of 'My Happy Job' Fabienne Broucuret and German Occupational Health expert and CEO of *scalefit* Dr Frank Emrich.

About "Emma"

The life-sized model "Emma" has been created based on conclusions from William Higham's 'The Work Colleague of the Future' report in which he worked with Fellowes and a panel of experts in ergonomics, occupational health and wellbeing at work. "Emma" was created to visually demonstrate the impact of the current workstation set up and how office workers' bodies could physically change if healthy working is not incorporated into workstation setups and office designs. The model was built by model building specialists, Helix 3D Ltd.

About 'The Work Colleague of the Future' Survey

The Work colleague of the Future survey was conducted by Atomic Research in June/July 2019. The sample consisted of 3,003 participants; 1,001 in France, 1,001 in Germany and 1,001 in the UK.

About Fellowes

Fellowes are a healthy workspace solution provider focusing on developing products and services to inspire healthy working for today and future generations. The company's thoughtfully designed ergonomic furniture and equipment helps increase productivity and reduce absenteeism, thus helping employees to be at their best in the workplace.

A family-owned business that was founded in 1917, Fellowes now operates from 18 locations across the world.

References

¹ Vitality Health, January 2018

² Atomic research, July 2019

³ The Work Colleague of the Future, September 2019