

The Secret to a Healthier 2021 May Be in How We Sit

The pandemic is causing new health issues not anticipated by health professionals



It's about this time every year when those New Year's resolutions begin to lose focus. But a new survey conducted by Herman Miller (NASDAQ: MLHR) indicates that perhaps an unexpected resolution brought on by the pandemic may be the easiest one to complete yet, and one that won't fade in just a few weeks. The resolution? Investing in a better home office.

Wellness has always been a prominent New Year's focus, featuring a plethora of new gym memberships, diet plans, and better bedtimes. But after a year that altered every facet of normal life, it's no surprise to see massive shifts in lifestyles, needs, and goals for the future. According to the new research by Herman Miller, the COVID-19 pandemic may have us thinking differently about how we stay healthy in 2021. Herman Miller surveyed 1,000 office workers now working at home due to COVID-19, gaining interesting insights into health and productivity. According to the survey, workers are sitting 20% more than they did pre-pandemic, 9 out of 10 are experiencing real health problems, and the number of workers sitting for more than 8 hours a day has increased nearly 90%.

"Diet, exercise, drinking enough water—all of those are key if you want to impact your health," says Debbie Propst, President of Herman Miller Group Retail. "But you can't stop there. For total wellness, we need to think about how and where we sit just as much. That's not a new finding for us—Herman Miller has been saying that for decades. But now after experiencing work away from their ergonomically equipped offices, people are starting to finally believe it."

Of the 1,000 office workers surveyed, nearly 90% of them reported experiencing pain or ailments such as a stiff neck (39.4%), back pain (53.13%), difficulty sleeping (44.28%), sore arms (34.53%), sore legs (33.83%), and headaches or eye strain (27.26%) since the beginning of the pandemic.

"Statistically speaking, those are some shocking numbers," says Propst. "Anecdotally, we heard of lots of issues from our own employees and worked to provide them ways to get proper office furniture for their homes. To better help other companies and individuals, we needed to understand the impact the migration from office to work-from-home had on workers. What we found was people are inside more, sitting longer than they ever have, and don't have the right equipment to perform their best or quite frankly; stay healthy."

While people certainly knew the difference between a dining chair and an office chair prior to the pandemic, they underestimated the value of ergonomic office furniture. More than half responded they are not working in a home office space but instead are typically working from the kitchen or dining room table, couch, bed, and/or car. "At the start of the pandemic, people were happy sitting anywhere," adds Propst. "But as days turned to weeks and weeks to months, people really began to feel unhealthy and recognize the need for ergonomic solutions." The research found that nearly 8 out of 10 office workers who are now working from home believe having a better home office setup would help them to be more productive while 95% agreed they need improvements (such as an ergonomically designed chair, an extra monitor, or a height adjustable desk) to feel more comfortable and healthy working from home.

"Almost every company we speak with is focused on two things during the pandemic: keeping their employees healthy and equipping them with what they

need to be productive,” says Propst. “If they are sitting more than 8 hours a day, their health is absolutely tied to the ergonomics of how they are sitting. It stands to reason that an employee who is sitting comfortably and pain free will be more productive.”

Additionally, the Herman Miller survey found that over 40% rank an ergonomically designed office chair at the top of their wish list and an overwhelming 78% of Americans agree they would like to receive a new, ergonomically designed chair for work or gaming as a gift. “We’ve seen a significant increase in home office purchases over the last few quarters,” says Propst. “As people have acclimated to remote work, they’ve been able to turn their focus on their wellness and what they need to support their health. In terms of commitment, creating an ergonomic workspace could be one of the easiest new year goals to accomplish—once you have it, it will provide countless benefits for years to come.”

The survey, which included over 1,000 US workers who are currently working from home, was conducted in partnership with One Poll.

“The new year has always been a perfect time to reflect and reexamine how we are supporting our health,” says Propst. “While that reflection process is perhaps more difficult this year, unique circumstances often leave behind unique lessons that will be relevant for the rest of our lives. Whether someone had never given their home office any thought or had but wasn’t sure where to start, our goal is to equip and support the needs of everyone with office solutions that will empower them to succeed, dream, and grow, regardless of what the future holds.”

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