

Replacing Office Chairs with Exercise Balls

By Heather Ritz

Exercise balls, also known as FitBalls, Swiss Balls, Physio Balls, etc., have increased in popularity and are commonly seen when visiting a local gym or rehabilitation center. Oddly enough, they can be found in the office as well. One of the latest office trends has been to replace the office chair with an exercise ball. While the ball has significant advantages in promoting core strength training in routine exercises, there are significant drawbacks when using the ball in your everyday work environment.

To begin with, the ball promotes trunk stability and the use of the lower back and core abdominal muscles to support the body while maintaining a neutral spine posture. Using these muscles is a good way to strengthen them, but only for a limited amount of time. Over an eight-hour shift, the muscles will fatigue rapidly, causing the body to compensate and assume non-neutral postures, otherwise known as slumping. Slumping will place pressure on the spinal discs, which may cause discomfort and outweigh the assumed benefits of using the ball at work. The ball can also be unstable and have a tendency to roll, even when placed in a ring, thereby introducing a safety hazard in the office.

In addition, the balls are not height adjustable and do not accommodate workers of different statures. Because the balls are a fixed height, workers may assume non-neutral arm and leg postures while seated at a desk. Working with shrugged shoulders or dangled arms for the duration of the day may create discomfort, again outweighing the perceived benefits of the ball.

Finally, while there are therapeutic and training benefits to using an exercise ball as an office chair, inherent risks exist with sustained use of the ball. To be most effective, exercise balls should be used for their primary purpose, in physical therapy centers and training facilities. To get the most support, stability, and adjustability from your office seating, use standard ergonomic office chairs available on the market today.

Source: http://www.humantech.com/ergo_accelerator_issue45_SD.htm as retrieved on Oct 9, 2006 15:54:08 GMT.