

Expert: How to Lessen Cancer Risk at Work

An interview with



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What steps can businesses take to mitigate, or lessen, cancer risk for employees?

I believe all businesses, regardless of workforce size, have a unique opportunity to prevent cancer in the workplace.

Early screening and prevention tools are not used as effectively as they could be, and result in the biggest successes and are often the most effective weapons in the

war on cancer.

Cancer prevention programs, such as tobacco cessation, as well as regular screenings (i.e., breast, colon, skin, etc.), are proven methods of decreasing cancer risk among employees, increasing early diagnosis, and increasing overall direct and indirect cost savings.

Research findings from the Firefighter Cancer Initiative at Sylvester Comprehensive Cancer Center have documented an elevated risk of skin cancer in Florida firefighters. They are diagnosed with skin cancer at an earlier age and in greater numbers when compared to the general Florida population.

We encourage firefighters to immediately decontaminate from the soot and other carcinogens they are exposed to on the fire scene and visit their primary care provider annually to conduct full-body skin examinations for changes in skin lesions.

What are the typical cancer risks in an office environment?

Approximately one-third of all cancers are related to modifiable lifestyle factors such as sedentary behavior, poor dietary practices, and tobacco use.

In the age of COVID-19, where employees may be teleworking and engaging in the Zoom shuffle (i.e., back-to-back virtual meetings), businesses should encourage walking meetings. In our earlier research, published in the CDC's journal, preventing chronic disease, we documented how white-collar workers could easily convert traditional seated meetings to walking meetings by simply re-organizing the agenda to items that could be discussed while walking.



Instead of having workers sit through a 30-minute zoom session, ask them to stand with you, take the zoom call on their mobile device and walk around (socially distant, of course) to increase the number of steps you take in a day. Converting certain components of your meeting(s) to walking will support daily physical activity metrics and contribute to cancer control and prevention efforts!

How can employers encourage workers to participate in cancer screenings and recognize the warning signs?

Worksites are an important venue for efforts to reduce cancer.

Businesses can influence health behaviors of their workforce through:

- educational risk reduction messages (increasing the use of fruits and

vegetables)

- promoting environmental supports (encouraging bouts of physical activity at the worksite)
- leveraging natural social networks (co-worker and supervisor support to engage in screening behaviors)

Employers should find creative ways to decrease stress and anxiety in the workplace. This will not only encourage higher productivity but may reduce healthcare costs. Cancer has been linked to stress and a person's inability to relax.

Some large organizations could provide employees with creative venues or programming that help elevate mood and control the harmful effects of work-related pressure — avoiding long-term sedentary behavior at work (think walking meetings) and enhancing cancer prevention.

Questions compiled by Izabela Bos, social media manager for UHealth, Sylvester, and the Miller School of Medicine.

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