

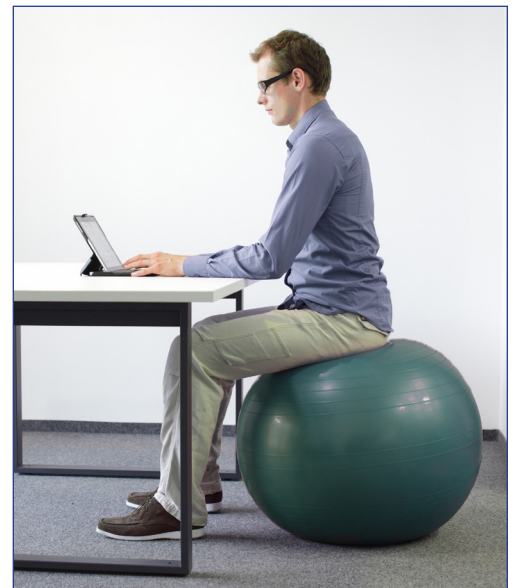
# ERGO BULLETIN

## Alternate Office Sitting: Exercise Balls

*Fitness trends are nothing new in the United States and when a trend gets national attention, people may be willing to jump in head first without getting all of the facts. Also, with lower back pain (LBP) a common issue associated with a number of different jobs, ergonomic equipment and furniture is more popular than ever. With this in mind, it can be easy to see why people would be willing to try anything new in the workplace if there's a chance it can potentially provide them with health benefits AND alleviation of any ongoing physical discomfort.*

While using exercise balls rather than traditional chairs is not a new concept, there still appears to be a number of misconceptions out there that many perceive as fact relative to this trendy office chair replacement. Consider the following four topics when thinking about adding an exercise ball to your workstation:

- 1 Workout While at Work:** For many, selecting an exercise ball for a chair may be tied to the desire to add physical activity to an otherwise sedentary job position. While the thought of burning a few calories while at the computer may seem enticing, several studies on this subject have shown a minimal increase in caloric expenditure during the average work day. This product can be very effective for activating core muscles when exercising in a gym or at home, as the time under tension can be effectively controlled. When applied over an entire work day, however, muscle fatigue and musculoskeletal injury might occur with prolonged use.
- 2 Lower Back Pain Relief:** Some people may be tempted to select an exercise ball chair for their workstation while searching for LBP relief. This may be due to the way the hips sink back when sitting on top of the exercise ball. However, there is an increase in contact area of the backside and the surface of the ball when seated like this. When combined with the lack of physical lumbar support, the overall stress load being applied to the lumbar spine may actually be higher when sitting on the ball versus a traditional office chair. This stress load could also be amplified as the lower back muscles inevitably begin to fatigue and the ability to maintain an upright sitting position is compromised.
- 3 Ergonomic Design Concerns:** If the right size ball is not purchased for an individual, accessing their desk may prove challenging. With exercise balls not being height adjustable, an individual may be exposed to a host of new ergonomic risks as overall work posture is compromised. Since the ball doesn't move like a traditional castor chair does, this may actually influence leaning and twisting at the lumbar spine when attempting to access various parts of a workstation.
- 4 General Safety Concerns:** While many brands are advertised as "burst resistant", an exercise ball is still an inflatable product and can pop if punctured. Similarly, since it is spherical in shape, the exercise ball could shift or even roll away when a user tries to stand when reaching for something on their workstation.



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