EMPLOYEE PAIN POINTS

Japanese workers are uncomfortable at their desks, but don’t have the tools to address these physical problems.

A new survey from Microsoft finds that today’s employers shouldn’t just be worried about job satisfaction or employee turnover when they think about managing their staff. A startling majority of the computing workforce* is uncomfortable on at least a daily basis, with current desk setups and office accessories partly to blame. Comfort at the office is a top priority for workers, especially because it will make them better at their jobs and happier in their personal lives. But unfortunately, ergonomic accessories are absent from many workplaces. What’s more, workers don’t feel that their employers are invested enough in relieving their pain – but they’re not making strides of their own to get better either.

*Online survey of Japanese who work full-time or part-time and spend at least three hours on their computer for work each day
PERSISTENT PAIN

Uncomfortable workplaces cause pain, and most workers’ desk setups are partly to blame.

**Regular Pain.** More than nine in ten (92%) workers report that they experience discomfort at work. And more than two in ten (22%) of these workers reveal that this happens to them for at least half of each day, if not more often.

**Thinking Ahead.** And many of these sufferers are concerned about what this might mean for them in the long run. Almost six in ten (59%) worry more about the impact of these aches and pains on their long-term health than simply having to deal with it on a daily basis.

92% of workers are uncomfortable on the job.
**Pointing to Pain.** Workers cite the top two sources of their physical distress as spending numerous hours sitting at their desks (43%) and staring at computer screens (45%). Other culprits include typing for a long time (22%) and repeatedly using an external mouse (10%).

- Spending a lot of time behind a computer screen is more commonly seen as a cause of discomfort by workers with desktops vs. laptops or tablets (49% vs. 40%).

- Using an external mouse is a more common cause of discomfort for male workers than female workers (13% vs. 5%).

**Setting Themselves Up for Failure.** Almost one in ten (8%) workers who encounter physical discomfort at work are apt to blame their current setup at work, such as the accessories they use or how things are arranged on their desks.

**Sources of discomfort at work***

- Staring at a computer screen for long periods of time: 45%
- Sitting at my desk for long periods of time: 43%
- Typing for long periods of time: 22%
- Sitting in meetings for long periods of time: 20%
- An unrelated condition: 16%
- Extensive use of an external mouse: 10%
- My current setup at work: 8%
- Extensive trackpad use: 8%
- Manual labor: 6%
- An unrelated injury: 5%
- Other: 9%

*Among respondents who have experienced discomfort at work*
Not About Time. Additionally, one-third (33%) say that their discomfort is far more likely to be caused by their current setup at work or the specific office accessories they use than the number of hours spent at the office.

Hurting All Over. This may be why many report that their discomfort has impacted the areas that tend to be most affected by a poorly set up desk area: the neck (46%), shoulders (57%), wrists (17%), upper back (20%) and hands (14%).

- Female workers are more apt than their male counterparts to report that their work-related discomfort occurs in their neck (52% vs. 42%) and hands (18% vs. 11%).
- Workers ages 18-34 are more likely than their 35+ colleagues to encounter such pain in their hands (18% vs. 11%).

Body parts affected by discomfort at work*

*Among respondents who have experienced discomfort at work
SEEKING RELIEF

Most employees value comfort at work, and know that it would make them more productive and happier.

At work, is it more important that you are...?

- Comfortable: 33%
- Stress-free: 67%

High Priority. One-third (33%) of employees – regardless of whether they encounter discomfort on the job now -- admit it’s more crucial for them to be comfortable than stress-free at work.

  - This sentiment is more common among men than women (37% vs. 28%).

#1 Choice. In fact, seven in ten (71%) employees would place comfort as a top priority if they were in charge of selecting the office accessories where they work – it would be just as crucial as price (72%).

Easy Sacrifices. More than two in five (44%) of those who experience discomfort would be quick to give up their company holiday party to be comfortable all of the time. And 35 percent would choose constant comfort over free food at the office.

Pain Relief Over Perks. What’s more, over a quarter (26%) of all workers would prefer comfort at work in the place of an office with a window.
Building Better Employees. Many workers know that more comfort equals more productivity. More than two in five (43%) employees believe they’d complete most tasks faster if they never felt any work-related pain. Another 17 percent say they would take fewer breaks.

Personal Profit. A more comfortable workspace is likely to yield some benefits outside of the office, too. More than four in ten think they’d have more energy (43%) and feel better when the workday ends (41%). Thirty-seven percent might even sleep better.

Worth the Investment. This is likely why almost two in five (37%) workers would be willing to chip in some of their own money to ensure constant comfort at work if their employers weren’t willing to take care of them in this way. On average, this proactive group would spend ¥723 each month to make this happen.

- To take comfort into their own hands at work, employees on desktops would shell out more monthly money than their counterparts who use laptops or tablets (¥770 vs. ¥663).

If workers were more comfortable on the job...

- 43% would complete tasks faster than usual
- 43% would have more energy
- 41% would feel better when they get home
- 37% would sleep better
MISSING PIECES

Even though discomfort repeatedly gets in the way of work, ergonomic accessories are being overlooked.

Undesirable Effects. Just as more comfort would bring productivity, discomfort is dealing a serious blow to job performance right now. Because they’ve been uncomfortable at work, many workers admit they’ve been unable to focus (44%) and felt like they weren’t doing their best at work (21%).

Putting in Fewer Hours. What’s more, over half (54%) report that they take breaks from their work to deal with their discomfort in the moment; one in ten (13%) confess they take longer breaks due to their pain. And eight percent are apt to leave work early when discomfort strikes at the office.

54% take breaks the moment they feel uncomfortable at work

13% take longer breaks because of discomfort at work
Unfortunate Obstacle. Clearly, a lot of time is wasted in the face of discomfort. Almost two-thirds (64%) report that they have difficulty doing their jobs at least once a month for this reason. On average, this lasts for seven hours each month.

- Men had a higher average time lost to discomfort than women (9 hours vs. 5 hours).

No Support. Yet, close to two-thirds (63%) report that not a single ergonomic item can be found at their current workstations. And 73 percent say that outside of their chairs, ergonomic accessories are not present where they work.

Uncomfortable Items. What’s more, only one in ten are able to say that their external keyboards (12%) or external mice (12%) are ergonomic, or designed to minimize discomfort or fatigue.

Which office accessories of yours are ergonomic?

- 22% Chair
- 12% Mouse
- 12% Keyboard
- 11% Monitor
- 11% Desk
- 11% Computer

63% Nothing
ACHING ALONE

Many workers aren’t getting the support they expect from their employers.

Regular Pain. Perhaps because of the obvious impact of discomfort on efficiency, more than two-thirds (68%) of workers believe that their company should be responsible for addressing this issue when it appears, and not the workers themselves.

Who is responsible for ensuring employee comfort?

- My company: 68%
- Employees: 32%
Not Enough Support. But unfortunately, only a little more than a quarter of workers feel that the company they work for truly cares about the health (28%) or comfort (26%) of its employees.

Not Enough Support. And more than three in ten (31%) don’t think this would change even when they encounter discomfort. They believe instead that they’d be the ones to suggest more comfortable office accessories, rather than any of the powers that be – including human resources and IT – or their colleagues.

Unwilling to Ask. Yet, a minority (25%) of workers would actually feel assertive enough to request new office accessories from their employers, such as a new mouse. And more employees would find it easy to ask for more vacation time (21%) than a new monitor (12%), chair (11%) or desk (8%).

  * More men than women would be comfortable asking for a new computer (22% vs. 10%) or a new monitor (14% vs. 8%).

Not Consulted. Many employees probably feel this way because the current items they use were simply handed to them. More than a quarter (28%) report that their keyboards were selected for them and two in five (40%) say that their mice were chosen for them without their input.

I would feel comfortable asking my employer for a new…

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<th>Item</th>
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<td>Mouse</td>
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SLOW TO ACT

Though they’re not always getting the care they want from the powers that be, few employees have taken their comfort into their own hands.

An Issue Worth Watching. Whether it’s a normal occurrence or not, almost three-quarters (74%) of workers who have experienced discomfort believe that it should be addressed. And 86 percent of this group sees workplace pain as a standard job hazard.

Discomfort at work should...*

- Be addressed: 74%
- Not be addressed: 26%

*Among respondents who have experienced discomfort at work
A Reason to Take Action. Almost a quarter (23%) also claim that a bout of pain would spur them to ask for more accommodating office accessories – a motivator equal to a doctor’s recommendation (20%).

No Follow-Through. Yet, less than two in ten (13%) have requested new office accessories to address their long-term discomfort.

Lack of Faith. Many of these workers might not be taking the initiative because they don’t think their need will be fulfilled in a timely manner. Fewer than one in five (17%) would describe their employers as a company that addresses employee requests quickly.

Actions taken to address long-term discomfort at work*

- Brought office accessories from home: 20%
- Spent less time at desk: 14%
- Spent own money on office accessories: 14%
- Requested new office accessories: 13%
- Consulted a doctor: 8%
- Requested a new setup at work: 6%
- Worked remotely more often: 6%
- Moved to a new department: 5%
- Got a new job: 4%
- Other: 0%
- Nothing: 46%

*Among respondents who have experienced discomfort at work
About The Survey The Microsoft PC Accessories Survey was conducted between 11 July and 22 July, 2013 among 542 Japanese workers (full-time and part-time) ages 18 and over who spend at least 3 hours a day on their computers for work, using an email invitation and an online survey.

Results of any sample are subject to sampling variation. The magnitude of the variation is measurable and is affected by the number of interviews and the level of the percentages expressing the results.

In this particular study, the chances are 95 in 100 that a survey result does not vary, plus or minus, by more than 4.2 percentage points from the result that would be obtained if interviews had been conducted with all persons in the universe represented by the sample. The margin of error for any subgroups will be slightly higher.

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