

EH&S Facts

Exercise Ball or Office Chair?

What is a Ball Chair?

The Swiss ball or “exercise ball,” widely used by physical therapists, exercise physiologists and athletic trainers for core strengthening and stability training, has gained popularity since introduced in the 1980’s.

Should you use an exercise ball as an office chair?

In recent years, exercise balls have been marketed as an “ergonomic seating alternative” to an office chair. Unfortunately, injuries associated with using a ball as an office chair have been reported. Lower quality balls have deflated or popped resulting in falls. In some cases, users have simply lost their balance and fallen. Over time, lack of back support and inappropriate sitting heights have caused fatigue and overuse injuries.



Proponents Advocate:

- Balls and ball chairs are inexpensive.
- Sitting on a ball activates trunk muscles and strengthens core muscles.
- They allow users to exercise while working.



Opponents Reply:

- You can slump as easily on a ball as on a chair.
- Balls are unstable. Users can lose balance and fall off during dynamic movements; balls can also roll out from under the user when standing up or sitting down.
- Ball chairs are not height adjustable and not ergonomic. Since chairs are part of a workstation system, this can result in inappropriate positioning of the worker at their desk.
- Using a ball to strengthen muscles should be done under the supervision of an athletic trainer or a medical professional.

Risks Associated with Prolonged Use of Ball Chairs

Balls and ball chairs are not recommended for prolonged office sitting. While sitting on a ball does activate trunk muscles, prolonged contraction of these muscles shortens them and compresses the discs of the spine. Prolonged disc compression is contraindicated, especially when added to the increased pressure sitting places on the lumbar discs.

In summary, if you want to use a ball in your office, consider using it only for short exercise periods. Do not try to use ball chairs for permanent seating, or when completing dynamic movements (such as typing or writing) or concentrating on work tasks. The safety concerns far outweigh any potential health benefits.

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