

Guidance Notes on Standing at Work and Service Counter Design



Occupational Safety and Health Branch
Labour Department



This booklet is prepared by the Occupational Safety and Health Branch
Labour Department

First edition December 2018

This booklet is issued free of charge and can be obtained from offices of the Occupational Safety and Health Branch of the Labour Department. It can also be downloaded from websites of the Labour Department at <http://www.labour.gov.hk>. For enquiry about the addresses and telephone numbers of the offices, please visit the website of the Department or call 2559 2297.

This booklet may be freely reproduced except for advertising, endorsement or commercial purposes. Please acknowledge the source as “Guidance Notes on Standing at Work and Service Counter Design”, published by the Labour Department.

Guidance Notes on Standing at Work and Service Counter Design

Contents

	Page
1. Introduction	3
2. Risk Assessment and Preventive Measures	4
2.1 Risk Assessment	4
2.2 Provision of Chairs	5
2.3 Risk Assessment Checklist	8
2.4 Appropriate Auxiliary Measures	12
2.5 Recommendations on Service Counter Design	14
2.5.1 Seated Service Counters	15
2.5.2 Standing Service Counters	17
3. References	19
4. Enquiries	20
5. Complaints	20

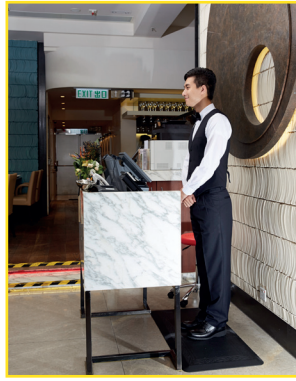
1. Introduction



In Hong Kong, many employees often work in a standing position, for example, cashiers, sales, customer service officers and security guards, etc. For some standing work involving restricted movement, for example, cashier work at retail shops or fast food restaurants, or customer service counter work in other service industries, employees are more likely to have muscle ache and fatigue, and pressure on the legs. Continuous pressure at legs is associated with various kinds of lower limb disorders like varicose vein and plantar fasciitis.

This guide aims to provide practical preventive measures to employers and employees on reducing the health risks of standing work, especially standing work with restricted movement. It also provides recommendations on how service counters should be designed to reduce the health risks faced by employees engaged in standing work at service counters.

In accordance with the Occupational Safety and Health Ordinance (Cap. 509), employers have a duty to ensure, so far as reasonably practicable, the safety and health of their employees at work. Such duty includes the provision and maintenance of systems of work that are, so far as reasonably practicable, safe and without risks to health.



Employees in some standing work involving restricted movement are more likely to have muscle ache and fatigue, and pressure on the legs.

2. Risk Assessment and Preventive Measures

2.1 Risk Assessment

First, for the work that can be done sitting, employers shall, so far as reasonably practicable, provide chairs for employees so that they can sit at work. Where employees are unable to work in a sitting position owing to the nature of work or work environment constraints, employers shall assess the health risks of the standing work to the employees and take appropriate preventive measures to safeguard their health.

In assessing the health risks, employers should pay particular attention to the standing work with restricted movement. Standing work with restricted movement involves employees spending most of their time standing or moving within a limited area. Standing work with restricted movement includes different kinds of work, for example, cashier work at retail shops or fast food restaurants, customer service counter work in other service industries, and security work at fixed guard posts, etc. For the aforementioned work, employers shall, so far as reasonably practicable, provide chairs at the working locations so that the employees can sit when the working condition permits.

2.2 Provision of Chairs

Please refer to the following guidelines about provision of chairs to the employees engaged in standing work with restricted movement.

- (A) If the work, by its nature, can be done sitting and the existing service counter design and work environment also allow sitting at work, employers shall provide suitable work chairs so that employees can sit at work. The work chair shall have a back rest. The seat pan should be soft. The seat height should also be adjustable as far as possible. If a work chair with fixed height is chosen, the employer shall ensure that the employee can place his/her feet flat on the floor or on a footrest naturally when seated, and can adopt a natural comfortable posture at work.
- (B) If the work, by its nature, can be done sitting but the existing service counter design or work environment is not suitable for sitting work (e.g. the existing counter does not have sufficient space); or the work nature requires the work to be done standing (e.g. the work involves a lot of moving around at the counter area), employers shall, so far as reasonably practicable, provide suitable chairs at the working locations for employees to sit down when the working condition permits. The chair shall be of suitable height so that the employee can place his/her feet flat on the floor or on a footrest naturally when seated.
- (C) For the situation mentioned in (B), if it is not reasonably practicable to provide a chair at the working location (e.g. space constraint), employers shall provide chairs of suitable height near the working locations for employees to sit down when the working condition permits.
- (D) For the situation mentioned in (C), if it is not reasonably practicable to provide a chair near the working location, employers shall provide chairs of suitable height at the staff resting areas for employees to take rest.

- (E) For the situations mentioned in (B), (C) and (D), employers shall ensure that employees can sit down at suitable intervals for occasional resting at the working locations, near the working locations or at the staff resting areas, by arranging for employees a break with sitting for 10 to 15 minutes after continuous standing work for every 2 to 3 hours. In case there are employees with special needs (e.g. pregnant employees), employers shall increase the time for breaks with sitting according to their needs.

Sometimes, employers deploy employees to work at other premises. For example, distributors deploy employees to work at department stores to promote their products. Under this circumstance, employers also have a duty to provide chairs and arrange breaks with sitting for these deployed employees in accordance with the aforementioned guidelines. In addition, the Labour Department expects that occupiers of the premises (e.g. management of department stores) can assist employers in discharging their duties, for example, by allowing the placing of chairs at the working locations of the employees deployed to work there.



For the work that can be done sitting, employers shall, so far as reasonably practicable, provide chairs for employees so that they can sit at work.



Provide a suitable chair at the working location for the employee to sit down when the working condition permits.



Sitting at suitable intervals for occasional resting can relieve employee's fatigue effectively.



Employee may do appropriate stretching exercises to relax their legs during rest breaks.

2.3 Risk Assessment Checklist

Employers may make reference to the following Risk Assessment Checklist to assess the health risks of standing work. The checklist not only lists out relevant factors that should be taken into account in the assessment, but also recommends some basic preventive measures. The list of factors should not be seen as exhaustive. In using the checklist, employers should also consider the work nature of their employees and the particular circumstances of their workplaces. Employers may appoint a person who is familiar with the work process and has basic knowledge of occupational safety and health to conduct a risk assessment. Based on the findings and recommendations of the assessment, employers should take the necessary preventive measures. Whenever there is a significant change to the work environment or circumstance, employers shall review the assessment.

Risk Assessment Checklist for Standing Work

	Questions	Yes	No
Q1	Does the work involve standing work with restricted movement?	<input type="checkbox"/> ▶ Go to Q2	<input type="checkbox"/> ▶ If the employee needs to walk around at work, the risk of standing work is relatively lower. However, the employer should also select appropriate auxiliary measures with reference to section 2.4 , including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Arrange job rotation; • Remind the employee to wear suitable shoes; • Train and encourage the employee to do stretching exercises. [Go to Conclusion and Follow-up] ▶ Note: If the employee works at different locations in a workplace but some tasks can be done sitting (e.g. in some situations, a security guard can watch over a place or museum exhibits in a sitting position), the employer shall, so far as reasonably practicable, provide a work chair for the employee so that the employee can sit at work.
Q2	Can the work be done sitting by the nature of the work?	<input type="checkbox"/> ▶ Go to Q3	<input type="checkbox"/> ▶ Go to Q4

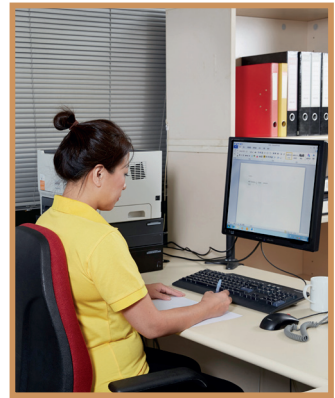
	Questions	Yes	No
Q3	Is the existing service counter design or work environment suitable for sitting work?	<input type="checkbox"/> ▶ Provide a suitable work chair. [Go to Conclusion and Follow-up]	<input type="checkbox"/> ▶ As far as possible, change the design of the service counter or work environment to make it suitable for sitting work with reference to section 2.5. ▶ Go to Q4
Q4	Is it reasonably practicable to provide a suitable chair at the working location?	<input type="checkbox"/> ▶ Provide a chair of suitable height at the working location for the employee to sit down when the working condition permits. ▶ Ensure that the employee can sit down at suitable intervals for occasional resting (refer to section 2.2(E)). ▶ Select appropriate auxiliary measures with reference to section 2.4, including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Arrange job rotation; • Install a foot-rail or a footrest; • Install resilient floor or place a shock absorbent mat; • Remind the employee to wear suitable shoes; • Train and encourage the employee to do stretching exercises. [Go to Conclusion and Follow-up]	<input type="checkbox"/> ▶ Go to Q5

	Questions	Yes	No
Q5	Is it reasonably practicable to provide a suitable chair near the working location ?	<input type="checkbox"/> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Provide a chair of suitable height near the working location for the employee to sit down when the working condition permits. ▶ Ensure that the employee can sit down at suitable intervals for occasional resting (refer to section 2.2(E)). ▶ Select appropriate auxiliary measures with reference to section 2.4, including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Arrange job rotation; • Install a foot-rail or a footrest; • Install resilient floor or place a shock absorbent mat; • Remind the employee to wear suitable shoes; • Train and encourage the employee to do stretching exercises. <p>[Go to Conclusion and Follow-up]</p>	<input type="checkbox"/> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Provide chairs of suitable height at the staff resting area. ▶ Ensure that the employee can take rests at suitable intervals at the staff resting area (refer to section 2.2(E)). ▶ Select appropriate auxiliary measures with reference to section 2.4, including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Arrange job rotation; • Install a foot-rail or a footrest; • Install resilient floor or place a shock absorbent mat; • Remind the employee to wear suitable shoes; • Train and encourage the employee to do stretching exercises. <p>[Go to Conclusion and Follow-up]</p>
Conclusion and Follow-up			

2.4 Appropriate Auxiliary Measures

In order to minimize the health risks of standing work, employers shall consider selecting the following appropriate auxiliary measures, depending on the working conditions. For those auxiliary measures that are not implemented, employers shall record the reasons and review them from time to time.

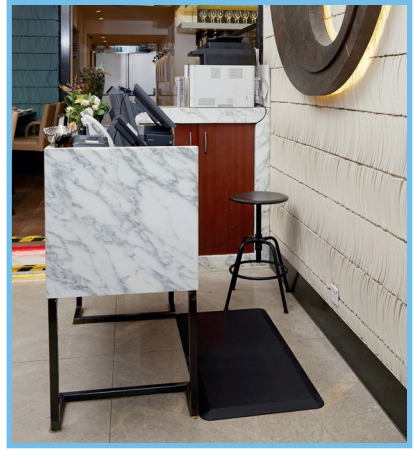
- Arrange job rotation, if practicable, to allow employees to change their working postures while performing work of a different nature.



Suitable work arrangements allow employees to change their working postures regularly.

- If the existing counter design is suitable for installing a foot-rail or a footrest, the employer shall do so at a suitable location of the counter to allow the employees to place either leg on the device alternately to reduce the fatigue whilst standing. In considering the installation of a foot-rail or a footrest, it must be noted that there shall be adequate room under the counters to accommodate the legs of employees, allowing the employees to keep their bodies close to the counters without leaning forward at work (see the picture at page 17).

- Install resilient floor such as wooden floor or carpeted floor to reduce the stress on the legs. If it is not practicable to install resilient floor, shock absorbent mats should be placed at the working locations where employees have to stand frequently. The mats must not cause any tripping or falling hazard ¹.



Place a shock absorbent mat on hard floor to reduce the stress on the legs of employees.

- Remind employees to wear suitable and supportive shoes. The shoes shall be able to maintain the shape of the foot and provide support for the arch of the foot; have adequate space to allow movement of toes; have shock-absorbing insoles, and have low heels (not higher than 5 cm or 2 inches).



Suitable shoes can reduce the health risks of standing.

¹ In adopting these measures, employers in the catering industry shall also comply with the requirements of other relevant government departments on the floors of catering establishments.

- Train and encourage employees to perform appropriate stretching exercises to relax their legs during work breaks.
- In case there are employees with special needs (e.g. pregnant employees), employers shall adjust their work temporarily in light of their needs. Such adjustments include reducing the duration of standing work, so that employees can have more time to sit down and to relieve the pressure of their lower limbs.

When arranging the auxiliary measures, employers shall not only take care of their employees, but also their employees working in other workplaces, so as to ensure the safety and health of all their employees at work.

2.5 Recommendations on Service Counter Design

If the nature of work allows the work to be done sitting, the employer should as far as possible design the service counter accordingly. As such, the employee can sit at work and the health risks of standing work can be eliminated. The design of a service counter should take account of the body size of the employee. It should allow the employee to adopt a natural working posture, and provide sufficient space for the employee to change postures freely. Some recommendations on service counter design are provided below to assist employers in providing a suitable work environment for employees.

2.5.1 Seated Service Counters

A seated service counter should have the following features:



Allow standing at work whenever needed

- Encourage alternate standing and sitting at work which enables regular changes of body postures.

Cater for employees with special needs

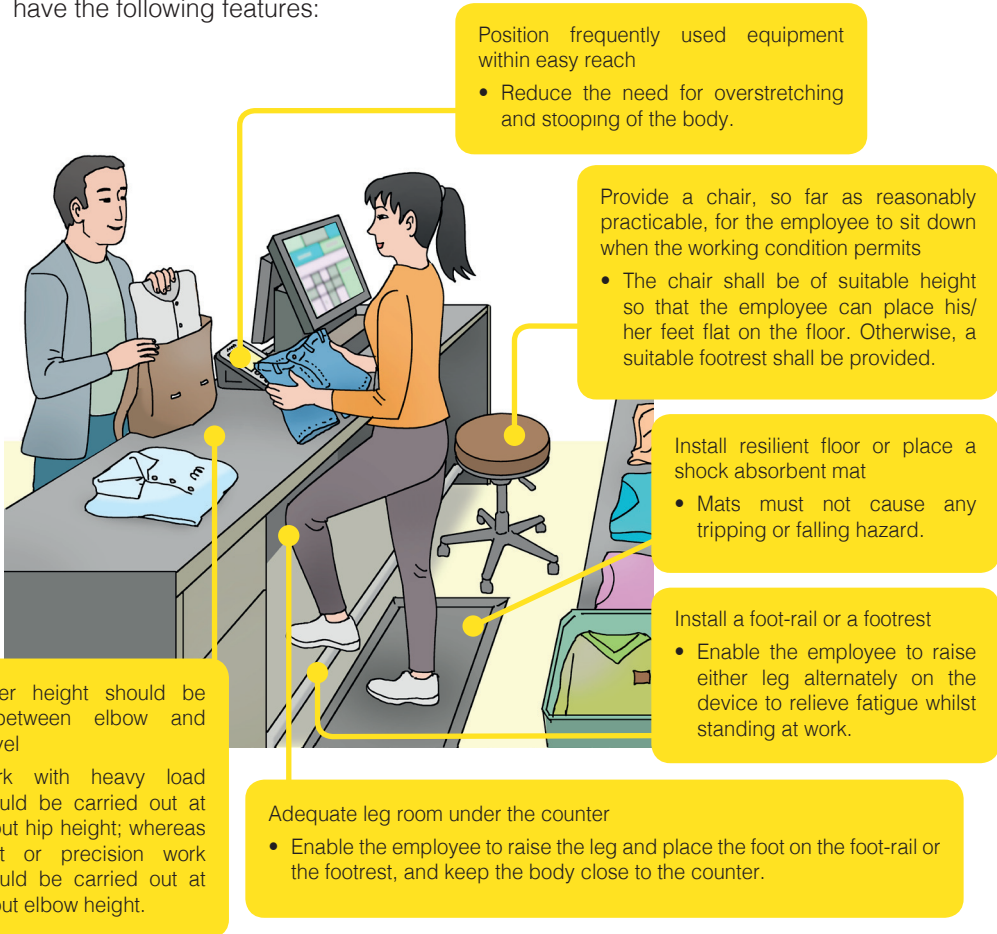
- Take account of the body size of individual employees and ensure that the counter allows a worker of larger size (including pregnant employees) to move and stand up freely.
- Provide a larger seat if necessary.



Provision of an electric conveyor belt at the cashier can facilitate the employee to sit at work.

2.5.2 Standing Service Counters

If standing service counters need to be used due to special situations (e.g. the work involves a lot of moving around at the counter area), these counters should also have the following features:



The counter should have adequate space

- Allow the employee to move around freely and change body postures.

Cater for employees with special needs

- Take account of the body size of individual employees and ensure that the counter allows a worker of larger size (including pregnant employees) to move and stand up freely.
- Provide a larger seat to worker for occasional resting if necessary.

Design of service counters varies. It depends on many factors, such as the size of the workplace, the work to be carried out, the size and weight of the articles to be handled, and movement need of employees, etc. A well-designed service counter should not only meet the operational needs of the work, but also safeguard the safety and health of the employees at work.

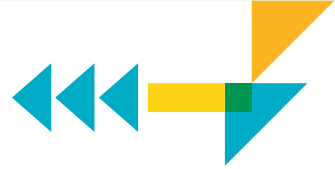


3. References

1. Ergonomic Checkpoints (2nd Edition), International Labour Office, 2010.
2. Industry Guidance Document, Checkout Workstations in Retail – Safe Design and Work Practices, WorkSafe, Government of Western Australia, 2005.
3. Managing Musculoskeletal Disorders in Checkout Work: A Brief Guide, INDG269(rev1) HSE Books, Health and Safety Executive, 2013.
4. Occupational postural activity and lower extremity discomfort: A review, International Journal of Industrial Ergonomics, 2010; 40:247–256 by Reid CR, Bush PM, Karwowski W, Durrani SK.
5. Seating at Work, HSG57 HSE Books, Health and Safety Executive, 2011.
6. Working in a Standing Position – Basic Information, Canadian Centre for Occupational Health and Safety, 2017.
7. Evidence of Health Risks Associated with Prolonged Standing at Work and Intervention Effectiveness, Rehabilitation Nursing, 2015; 40(3) 148-165 by Waters TR, Dick RB.
8. Working while standing, kneeling or squatting, Health Council of the Netherlands, 2011.
9. Work-related disease series – Lower Limb Varicose Vein, Labour Department, 2011.
10. Work-related disease series – Plantar Fasciitis, Labour Department, 2011.



4. Enquiries



If you wish to enquire about this booklet or other occupational safety and health matters, please contact the Occupational Safety and Health Branch of the Labour Department through:

Telephone : 2852 4041 or

2559 2297

(auto-recording service available outside office hours)

Fax : 2581 2049

E-mail : enquiry@labour.gov.hk

Information on the services offered by the Labour Department and on major labour legislation is also available on our website at <http://www.labour.gov.hk>.

For details on the services offered by the Occupational Safety and Health Council, please call 2739 9000, or browse the website at <http://www.oshc.org.hk>.

5. Complaints

If you have any complaints about unsafe workplaces and work practice, please call the Labour Department's occupational safety and health complaint hotline at 2542 2172. All complaints will be treated in the strictest confidence.

