

Study Finds More Exposure to Natural Light Can Improve Worker Health



Sometimes improving worker health can be as simple as letting more natural light into the workplace.

A new study from researchers at Northwestern Medicine and the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign Office found that workers with more light exposure at the office slept longer, had better sleep quality, engaged in more physical activity and had better quality of life compared to office workers with less light exposure in the workplace.

The study group included 49 day-shift office workers: 27 in windowless workplaces and 22 in workplaces with windows.

Their health-related quality of life and sleep quality were measured with a self-reported form. Light exposure, activity and sleep were measured by actigraphy—a single device worn on the wrist that gives measures of light exposure as well as activity and sleep—in a subset of 21 participants (10 in windowless workplaces and 11 in workplaces with windows).

Results: Employees with windows in the workplace received 173% more white light exposure during work hours and slept an average of 46 minutes more per night than employees who didn't have the natural light exposure in the workplace. In addition, workers in offices with windows had more physical activity than those without.

Workers without windows reported poorer scores than their counterparts on quality of life measures related to physical problems and vitality, as well as poorer outcomes on measures of overall sleep quality and sleep disturbances.

Bottom line: Workers are a group at risk because they're typically indoors often without access to natural or even artificial bright light for the entire day. This study confirms that light during the natural daylight hours is beneficial to workers' health through its effects on mood, alertness and metabolism.