



Workplace Wellness: Ways to Increase Your Physical Activity on the Job

Fact Sheet FS1107



Cooperative Extension

FAMILY AND COMMUNITY HEALTH SCIENCES

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Inactivity is Contributing to the Health of Working Adults

According to the U.S. Department of Human Services, more than 60% of U.S. adults do not engage in the recommended amount of physical activity. Additionally, about 25% of U.S. adults are not active at all. Our health is directly related to our physical activity!

Being healthy is not only good for the employee; it is also good for the employer. Employers can reduce health care costs and benefits by encouraging a healthier workforce. Healthy employees use less sick time, reduce their level of stress, and increase their energy and attention spans.

Many adults work at jobs where they sit at a desk and computer for long periods of time. Employees can increase their level of activity by increasing their movement while on the job. You should always contact your physician before beginning a new exercise program. Start slowly and gradually increase your physical activity.

This fact sheet is one of a four-part series titled; Workplace Wellness: Starting the Day with a Healthy Breakfast; Workplace Wellness: Eating Healthy While on the Job; and Workplace Wellness: Power Foods and Healthy Power Lunches are also available.

Incorporate Opportunities to Increase Your Physical Activity While at Work

According to the Centers for Disease Control, increased physical activity can help you control your weight, reduce your risk of disease, strengthen your bones and muscles, improve your mental health, and increase your chances of living longer.

A good way to determine how much activity you are getting everyday is to keep a walking log or use a pedometer to track your steps. Aim for 10,000 steps per day for maximum health benefits. Following is a list of simple ways to increase your physical activity while on the job:

- During good weather days park further away from the workplace entrance.
- Take short fitness breaks (3-5 minutes each) suggested below every hour throughout the day. Aim for walking a total of 30 minutes during the workday breaks and lunchtime.
 - Walk up and down the stairs a few times.
 - Stand up and sit down a few times to loosen your muscles.
 - Buddy up with a coworker to walk at scheduled break times.

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- Walk reports and other paperwork to colleagues rather than sending an email message.
- Walk in place in front of your desk for a few minutes.
- Taking the stairs burns five times more calories than taking the elevator.
- Seek out colleagues with similar interests and start a lunch-time walking club.
- Take a walk before or after lunch, split your allotted time in half to accommodate a designated time to walk.
- Set a goal to increase your number of steps per day and increase it periodically.
- While you are walking listen to motivating music with an MP3 player.
- Map out a walking trail that you can take during lunch break or after work.
- Purchase an exercise DVD that can be used during your lunch break. Be sure to check with your employer for approval when you are exercising at the worksite.
- Add variety to your walk by choosing different paths throughout the workplace.
- When walking at night choose a well-lighted, safe place with a smooth surface, wear light or reflective clothing, and remember to carry your cell phone and identification when you walk outside.

Boosting your physical activity helps you maintain good physical and mental health. Keep a good fitting pair of walking shoes at your desk and be ready for opportunities to take a few extra steps on the job each day. Check with your employer to see if they offer a gym membership incentive and seek out colleagues who are interested in signing up for fitness programs after work, or participating in community service walks and fund raisers. Energize your day by surrounding yourself with supportive people and be sure to inspire your walking buddies to maintain their momentum.

Exercising at Your Desk

Tied to your desk and craving a chance to stretch and flex your muscles? Here are a four easy exercises that can be done while sitting at your desk:

1. **Chair Squats:** Stand upright with your feet a shoulder's width apart. Inhale as you start sitting, but let your bottom gently touch the chair without sitting down. Exhale as you push yourself back up to a standing position. Squeeze your buttocks as you do this movement for one minute.
2. **Arm & Elbow Stretches:** Sit up tall in your chair, then, place your fingers on the back of the lower part of your head. Inhale and hold your elbows out wide, squeezing your shoulder blades together. Exhale as you bring your elbows together in front of your nose and feel the stretch in your upper back. Continue to breath deeply as you do this exercise for at least 30 seconds.
3. **Sit Up & Stretch:** Sit up tall in your chair. Spread your arms out wide as you reach both arms up high. Clasp your hands together high above your head, then gently stretch from right to left keeping your torso straight for 30 seconds.
4. **Water Bottle Overhead Press:** Sit comfortably in your chair with your shoulders relaxed. Relax your arms at your sides while holding a full water 12 or 16 ounce bottle in each hand. Lift your hands to shoulder height elbows bent, palms facing forward. Exhale as you push both arms up overhead palms facing forward. Inhale as you lower your arms to the starting position. Do this exercise for 30 seconds.

It is always important to check with your physician before starting a new exercise routine.

Increase your physical activity while at work today and live a healthier lifestyle tomorrow!

Taken from Shirley Archer's book, Fitness 9 to 5. (2006) Chronicle Books, San Francisco.

Additional Information

www.getmovinggethealthynj.rutgers.edu

www.njaes.rutgers.edu

www.cdc.gov

www.smallstep.gov

www.americaonthemove.org

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