
Active Employees Active Workplaces

Promoting & Supporting Physical Activity at Work



Employer Manual



Project Health

Supporting Healthy Workplaces

This manual is designed to help you make your workplace a supportive and health environment.



This manual can be downloaded from: www.projecthealth.ca

For more information or consultation, please call:

519-883-2287

or visit www.projecthealth.ca

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1.0 The Business Case

1.0 The Business Case

The economic burden of physical inactivity in Canada was \$5.3 billion in 2001. While \$1.6 billion was spent on direct health care costs (including costs associated with hospital, drug and physician care), the remaining \$3.7 billion went to indirect costs. Indirect costs included lost productivity due to premature death and lost activity days due to short-term and long-term disability. These indirect costs are often absorbed by businesses through absenteeism, injuries, staff turnover, disability compensation, extended health-care costs, life insurance costs, and decreased work productivity.¹

Promoting physical activity and supporting employees to be physically active is not just good for them, it is good for your business.

Canadians spend so much of their time at work, and lead busy lives outside of work that physical activity is often a healthy behaviour that takes a back seat to everything else. If they can't be active during their work day, they may not be active at all.

Canadian Fact

70% of working Canadians who currently receive support from their employers indicate that this support helps them be more active.

The majority of Canadian companies (81%) with 50 or more employees state that the physical activity behaviour of employees is a matter of interest and the responsibility of both the employer and the employee.

References: Cragg et al, 2007; Canadian Fitness & Lifestyle Research Institute, 2008



When employees are physically active, your business becomes active in more ways than one.²⁻¹²

- Improved morale and job satisfaction
- Improved tolerance to stress
- Improved productivity
- Decreased absenteeism
- Decreased health benefit costs especially related to high blood pressure, cardiovascular disease, diabetes, and cancer
- Decreased workplace injuries
- Improved recruitment and retention

According to the World Health Organization, when workplaces invest in physical activity programming for their employees as part of a comprehensive workplace health strategy, the return-on-investment can be quite substantial – an average of \$5.81 (U.S.) for every \$1.00 (U.S.) invested.¹²

Success Story: BC Hydro

The Lifestyle Program is comprised of seven main products:

- Health Education Deliverables
- Incentive Program
- Sport and Active Events
- Health and Wellness Events
- 'Lunch-and-Learn' Sessions
- Resource Library and Internal Website
- Fitness Centres

After 12 years, 80 per cent of BC Hydro employees are registered in Lifestyle's Incentive Program with 40 per cent actively participating.

Data from a cost/benefit study in 1996 showed:

- \$1.2 million in reduced sick leave costs annually
- \$97,000 in reduced accident costs per year
- \$35,000 Workers' Compensation Board rate reduction
- Productivity gains of \$919,000
- Employee retention and corporate image gains

Return on Investment: \$2.74 benefit for every \$1 spent

For more information about this success story or to read more about what other Canadian companies have done, visit <http://www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/alw-vat/studies-etudes/canadian-eng.php>.



2.0 Background Information

2.1 Why Be Active

Physical inactivity is a major cause of premature death from cardiovascular disease, cancer and type 2 diabetes. In Canada, physical inactivity cost \$5.3 billion in 2001. (\$1.6 billion for direct health care costs and \$3.7 billion for indirect costs).¹

Being active for 30 minutes at a moderate intensity on most days of the week is associated with a 30 per cent reduction in the risk for:¹³⁻¹⁵

- Premature death
- Cardiovascular disease
- Stroke
- High blood pressure
- Colon cancer
- Breast cancer
- Type 2 diabetes



The greatest benefit occurs when physical activity is spread throughout the week in periods of activity of at least 10 minutes in duration. There is some evidence, as well, that this level of physical activity may help some people prevent weight gain, however some people may need even greater physical activity levels for this.¹³⁻¹⁵

Participating in resistance activities on 2-4 days per week can reduce the risk of premature death and falls as well as improve:¹³⁻¹⁵

- Strength of muscles and bones
- Blood pressure
- Bone density
- Mobility and functional independence
- Overall quality of life

Finally, engaging in flexibility activities on 4-7 days each week may enhance mobility and functional independence and decrease the risk of falls.

“Every little bit counts, but more is even better – everyone can do it!”

Reference: Canada’s Physical Activity Guide to Healthy Active Living

2.2 Key Concepts

There are many terms that are used when talking about physical activity. The focus of this toolkit is active living and physical activity, however, it is important to differentiate these terms from one another as well as from other terms that are often used.

Active living is a way of life in which physical activity is valued and integrated into daily life (including the workplace). It can include any kind of physical movement.¹¹

Physical activity is any bodily movement produced by the contraction of skeletal muscle that increases energy used above the amount of energy used when at rest.¹⁶

Physical activity includes those activities a person does as part of their normal daily routine. Household, workplace and lifestyle physical activity are three of the most common types of physical activity:¹⁷

- Household physical activity, such as sweeping and cleaning
- Workplace physical activity, including lifting boxes or walking for longer than 10 minutes
- Lifestyle physical activity, such as carrying a basket at the grocery store rather than wheeling a cart

Exercise is a form of physical activity that is planned, structured and repetitive. It is done to improve or maintain physical fitness. Exercise is effective in improving people's health, well-being and overall quality of life.^{16, 17}

Examples of common exercise directions include the following:

- Do whole body resistance training three days per week (two sets of eight to 12 repetitions)
- Do whole body stretching exercises daily
- Do 30 minutes on a treadmill at 65 per cent of your maximum heart rate

Physical fitness has been defined as a set of characteristics a person has or achieves that enables them to perform physical activity.¹⁶

2.3 Canada's Physical Activity Guidelines

Canada's Physical Activity Guide to Healthy Active Living¹⁸ is intended to help people make choices about the amount and type of physical activity that is right for them. It also provides suggestions on ways to build activity into daily life. It is based on scientific evidence.

According to these guidelines, there are three types of exercise:



Endurance activities are continuous activities that provide benefits for your heart, lungs and circulatory system. It is recommended that adults participate in endurance activities *4-7 days a week*.



Flexibility activities include gentle reaching, bending and stretching activities to keep muscles relaxed and joints mobile. It is recommended that adults participate in flexibility activities *4-7 days a week*.



Strength activities use resistance to strengthen muscles and bones and improve posture. It is recommended that adults participate in strengthening activities *2-4 days a week*.

**Canada's Physical Activity Guide recommends:
30 to 60 minutes of moderate intensity activity every day.
This includes activity that occurs both during working hours and
during leisure time.**

**It does not have to occur all at the same time.
It can be added up in periods as short as 10 minutes each.**

For example:

20 minutes of brisk walking at lunch
+
10 minutes of stretching at your desk
+
20 minutes of yard work or vacuuming in the evening
+
10 minutes of abdominal curls or push-ups before or after work

For more information about Canada's Physical Activity Guide to Healthy Active Living, visit <http://www.paguide.com>

2.4 Current Physical Activity Levels

Leisure Time Physical Activity

Leisure time physical activity was measured in working-age Waterloo Region adults (20-64 years) in 2003 and 2007/08.^{19, 20}

In 2007/08, younger working adults (20-44 years) tended to be active while older working adults (45-64 years) were moderately active. What is concerning, however, is the increase in the percentage of adults in both age groups who were inactive between 2003 and 2007/08 while adults who were considered moderate or active decreased in both age groups during the same time period.



Table 1 provides a breakdown of the percentage of adults 20-64 years of age who were active, moderate and inactive for these two time periods.

Table 1: Percentage of Adults by Leisure Time Physical Activity, Waterloo Region, 20-64 years, 2003, 2007-2008^{19, 20}

	Active		Moderate		Inactive		Moderate or Active	
	2003	2007/08	2003	2007/08	2003	2007/08	2003	2007/08
20-44 years	25.1	22.0	29.4	20.6	45.5	57.4	54.5	42.6
45-64 years	16.9	16.4	31.3	27.6	51.8	56.0	48.2	44.1

Definitions:

Active – respondents who average 3.0+ kcal/kg/day of energy expenditure during leisure-time physical activity.

Moderately active – respondents who average 1.5-2.9 kcal/kg/day during leisure-time physical activity

Inactive – respondents with energy expenditure levels less than 1.5 kcal/kg/day during leisure-time physical activity

Reference: Canadian Community Health Survey, Cycle 2.1 (2003), Cycle 4.1 (2007-2008), Share File, Extracted may 19, 2009 and March 5, 2010

It should be noted that leisure time physical activity is only a small part of total physical activity. It does not include physical activity done as part of one’s job, household chores or active transportation.

Walking

In 2005, Region of Waterloo Public Health conducted a study of walking patterns of residents 18 years of age and older from three downtown neighbourhoods and three suburban neighbourhoods in Kitchener and Waterloo.²¹ Respondents living in inner-city neighbourhoods reported walking significantly more days per week than those from suburban neighbourhoods. Approximately 78 per cent of all respondents reported walking for leisure and exercise at least some of the time. However, respondents from inner-city neighbourhoods spent significantly more of their walking time doing errands and getting from place to place. Table 2 summarizes the similarities and differences between these two neighbourhood types.

Table 2: Walking Rates, Waterloo 2005

	Inner-city neighbourhoods	Suburban neighbourhoods
Average # of days per week walking	5.0*	4.1*
Average minutes of walking per day	47.7	41.1
% who walk for leisure	78	79
% of time spent on purposive walking doing errands, etc.	49.2*	33.5*

* represents a statistically significant difference ($p < 0.05$) between two neighbourhood types

Reference: Region of Waterloo Public Health (2005). *Urban form, physical activity and health*.
Waterloo ON: Author

Active Transportation



How employees get to and from work can factor into the amount of physical activity they get on a daily basis. Active transportation is about leaving the car at home and finding more active means to get around (e.g. cycling, walking, using public transportation).

The 2005 Region of Waterloo Public Health Study referred to above also assessed active transportation.²¹ Most respondents aged 18 years of age and older in the 2005 study lived or went to school in Waterloo Region. They spent an average of 21 minutes a day travelling an average of 18 kilometres to work or school each day. Significantly fewer respondents from inner-city neighbourhoods drove to work as they were more likely to walk or cycle to work or school than those from suburban neighbourhoods. Only a few respondents reported using Grand River Transit to get to work or school. Table 3 summarizes these travel patterns.

Table 3: Travel Patterns, Waterloo 2005

	Inner-city neighbourhoods	Suburban neighbourhoods
Average distance to work/school (km)	16.8	20.1
Average time it takes to travel to work/school (minutes)	21.3	22.0
% who drive to work/school	68*	86*
Average # of minutes per day spent driving in a car (minutes)	42.0*	73.8*
% who use Grand River Transit to get to work/school	6	5
% who cycle to work/school	8*	2*
% who do not own/rent/lease any vehicles	14*	2*
% who own/rent/lease more than 2 vehicles	9*	23*

* represents a statistically significant difference ($p < 0.05$) between two neighbourhood types

Reference: Region of Waterloo Public Health (2005). *Urban form, physical activity and health.*

Waterloo ON: Author

Table 3 also shows that respondents from inner-city neighbourhoods were significantly less likely to own or lease a vehicle and respondents from suburban neighbourhoods were more likely to own, rent or lease three or more vehicles. Despite similar commuting distances to work or school, respondents from suburban neighbourhoods spent significantly more time in a car each day than those from inner-city neighbourhoods. Of important significance for workplaces, those who drove for more than 30 minutes were found to be 1.64 times more likely to report being overweight or obese than those who drove 30 minutes or less each day, regardless of the type of neighbourhood in which they lived.

Section 3.3 of this toolkit (pages 45-46) provides more information about active transportation and how workplaces can encourage and support employees to choose a more active means of getting to and from work.

2.5 Barriers to Physical Activity



There are many reasons why Canadians do not get the recommended amount of physical activity. Barriers can be related to scheduling difficulties, financial issues, and psychological, physical or motivational factors. Two studies have been conducted in Canada to identify those barriers for the general Canadian population and more specifically for working Canadians.

In 2007, barriers to physical activity for the general Canadian population included:²²

- Lack of time
- Cost
- Long-term illness or disability
- Fear of injury
- Lack of energy or feeling too tired
- Lack of interest or motivation
- Lack of skill
- Feeling uncomfortable or ill-at-ease

Working Canadians were also surveyed about what barriers existed to being physically active during the work day. This 2006 study found the following barriers:⁵

- Constant deadlines at work
- Lack of time due to work
- Lack of pleasant places to walk, bicycle or be active near their workplace
- Roads near the workplace too busy to walk or bicycle safely

However, an overwhelming majority of working Canadians strongly agreed that regular physical activity helps employees:⁵

- Cope with and reduce their workplace stress
- Be more productive
- Recover from minor illnesses more quickly
- Do their work more effectively

Workplace barriers to being physically active can be reduced. The many benefits for both employees and businesses are a convincing argument about why this should be done.

2.6 Healthy Weight

People who maintain a healthy weight feel better, are less likely to develop chronic illness and enjoy a better quality of life.²³ Alternatively, those who are either under or overweight are more likely to experience health problems.²³

Body Mass Index

A healthy weight is defined as a Body Mass Index (BMI) of 18.5 to 24.9 kg/m².

An individual is classified as underweight if his or her BMI is less than 18.5 kg/m². The health risks associated with being underweight include an increased risk for osteoporosis, infertility and a decreased ability to fight infections.²³ In 2004, approximately two per cent of the adult Canadian population was underweight.²⁴

Overweight is defined as a BMI of 25 to 29.9 kg/m². Individuals are considered to be obese at a BMI of 30 kg/m² or higher. Being overweight or obese increases the likelihood of developing type 2 diabetes, heart disease and some types of cancer.²³ The proportion of adults who are overweight (BMI 25 to 29.9 kg/m²) and obese (BMI 30 kg/m²) has increased from 49.5 per cent in 2005 to 55.5 per cent in 2007/2008.^{25, 26} Excess weight now affects more than half (55 per cent) of the population in Waterloo Region.²⁵

For more information on calculating and interpreting Body Mass Index visit Health Canada's website on Healthy Weights (www.hc-sc.gc.ca/fn-an/nutrition/weights-poids/index-eng.php).



Waist Circumference

Waist circumference is a measure of abdominal fat in non-pregnant adults.²⁷ Even in individuals with a healthy BMI, a waist circumference above the recommended measurements is associated with an increased risk for diabetes, heart disease, stroke and hypertension.²⁷

An individual's waist circumference should be no higher than the recommendations in Table 1.

Table 1: Waist Circumference Recommendations by Gender and Ethnicity.

Ethnicity	Men	Women
European/Caucasian, Sub-Saharan Africans, Eastern Mediterranean, Middle Eastern	≤102 cm (40 in.)	≤88 cm (35 in.)
South Asian, Malaysian, Asian, Indian, Chinese, Japanese, Ethnic South and Central Americans	≤90 cm (35 in.)	≤80 cm (32 in.)

Reference: The Heart & Stroke Foundation of Ontario, 2009.

For more information on calculating and interpreting waist circumference visit the Heart and Stroke Foundation's website

www.heartandstroke.com/site/c.iklQLcMWJtE/b.3876195/k.87BF/Healthy_Waists.htm?src=home

The Importance of Healthy Weights in the Workplace

Obesity is associated with a lower health-related quality of life both mentally and physically, which can decrease workforce participation.²⁸ Workplaces should consider the health of their employees as a top priority to meet human resource needs for the near future. The Conference Board of Canada has reported an expected labour supply shortfall in Ontario starting in 2014 with increasing shortfalls in for many years following.²⁹

In 2005, 63 per cent of employed men and 50 per cent of employed women in Canada were either overweight or obese based on measured height and weight (see BMI on page 18).³⁰ Obesity rates are highest among men whose usual daily activities involve carrying very heavy loads, labour intensive work, shift-work or working longer hours than regular full-time workers.³⁰

Women earning a lower income are more likely than high income earning women to be obese.³⁰ Similarly, having lower levels of education significantly increases the odds of obesity for both men and women.^{30, 31}

Workplaces incur a significant cost for overweight and obese employees in the form of losses related to lower productivity, higher rates of injury, disability and absenteeism, increased insurance premiums, worker's compensation, medical costs and early retirement.³¹⁻³⁸ Direct and indirect costs of absenteeism combined, account for approximately 17 per cent of payroll expenses in Canadian workplaces.³⁹

Estimates (in the U.S.) are \$462 to \$2485 for increased medical expenditures and absenteeism for obese workers.⁴⁰

In some cases, obesity may reduce the availability or effectiveness of personal protective equipment, causing a higher risk for workplace injury.⁴¹ Obesity can also cause disruptions in sleep, which has been implicated as a risk factor for traffic collisions.^{41, 42}

Historically, workplaces have taken responsibility for decreasing environmental risks in the workplace, while the onus has been on employees to be responsible for maintaining a healthy weight.⁴¹ However, it is likely that the workplace environment contributes to weight gain.^{41, 43}

Research shows that five developments have led to rising obesity during the last few decades:⁴⁴

- 1) Expanding labour market opportunities for women
- 2) Increased consumption of food away from home
- 3) Rising costs of healthy foods relative to unhealthy foods
- 4) Growing caloric intake with declining overall food prices
- 5) Decreased occupational and environmental physical activity

While the focus of this toolkit is on physical activity, it is important to note that the developments presented above cannot be considered independently of one another. Instead, it is the interplay between all of these that has led to this rising rate of obesity. For information about healthy eating and the role of the workplace, please refer to Project Health's *Healthy Eating Toolkit for Workplaces*.

<http://www.projecthealth.ca/files/healthy-eating-toolkit-for-workplaces.pdf>

Multi-component strategies that target diet, physical activity and behavioural changes at the same time have been effective when delivered through the workplace.⁴⁵





3.0 Getting Started

3.0 Getting Started

Below are some steps to get a comprehensive health initiative started in your workplace.

3.1 Assemble Key Players

- Get senior management commitment
- Use the background information in this toolkit to build your case to management
- Establish a physical activity committee or a workplace wellness committee

When senior management's commitment and involvement is visible, employees are more likely to commit to and participate in creating a healthy workplace. Building a business case allows owners and managers to see the importance of physical activity and understand the short and long-term impact of a comprehensive approach.

Key indicators to include in your business case: ⁴⁶

- Current employee turnover
- Employee job satisfaction
- Absenteeism
- Disease rates
- Number of musculoskeletal injuries
- Health care claims data (current and past)
- Stress-related illnesses
- Employee demographics
- Current physical activity levels of employees



For more information about building your business case:

Alberta Centre for Active Living – Physical Activity @ Work – Gaining Support from Management - <http://www.centre4activeliving.ca/workplace/steps/planning/step1.html>

Heart & Stroke Foundation of New Brunswick – Wellness at Heart Toolkit - http://www.heartandstroke.nb.ca/site/c.kpIPKZOyFkG/b.4835889/k.95A2/Workplace_Wellness_Toolkit.htm

Public Health Agency of Canada – Active Living at Work – Business Case Studies and Template - <http://www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/alw-vat/studies-etudes/index-eng.php>

Project Health - webpage dedicated to many links to sample business case resources - <http://www.projecthealth.ca/understanding-workplace-health/making-business-case>

3.2 Establish a Baseline/Conduct a Needs Assessment

The goal of the assessment is to determine how and when employees would like to be active and what they would expect from a physical activity program.

- Measure current physical activity practices and identify areas that need to be addressed. Determine their readiness for change if they are currently inactive.
 - There are a variety of different methods that can be used (e.g., small group discussions, a suggestion box, surveys), alone or in combination to collect information from employees.
- Use an environmental support checklist to identify opportunities for improvement.
- Determine staff support.

Once you have the results of these assessments, it is important to prioritize each need and any supporting pieces that might be required, for example, if a group of employees wanted to bike to work on a regular basis, bike racks, showers and changing facilities should be given priority.

For more information and sample employee surveys and needs assessments:

Alberta Centre for Active Living

- Physical Activity @ Work – Finding Out What’s Possible in Your Workplace - <http://www.centre4activeliving.ca/workplace/steps/planning/step3.html>
- Physical Activity @ Work – Finding Out What Employees Want or Need - <http://www.centre4activeliving.ca/workplace/steps/planning/step4.html>
- Workplace Physical Activity Framework – See section titled “Audit Tool” http://www.centre4activeliving.ca/publications/researchandreports/2003_workplace/WPFramework.pdf

British Heart Foundation – Sample Employee Needs Assessment Questionnaire and Sample Workplace Assessment -

http://www.bhf.org.uk/HealthAtWork/getting_active_at_work/resources/download_now.aspx

U.S. Centre for Disease Control and Prevention – Workplace Walkability Audit -

<http://www.cdc.gov/nccdphp/dnpao/hwi/toolkits/walkability/index.htm>

Project Health – webpage dedicated to links to many samples of needs assessments and surveys – <http://www.projecthealth.ca/understanding-workplace-health/assessment/survey-tools>

Heart & Stroke Foundation of New Brunswick – Wellness at Heart Toolkit -

<http://www.heartandstroke.nb.ca/site/c.kpIPKZOyFkG/b.4835889/k.95A2/WorkplaceWellnessToolkit.htm>

3.3 Create a Work Plan

Using this *Active Employees, Active Workplaces* Toolkit, choose the areas (i.e. awareness raising, skill building, supportive environment, policy) and tools, that you feel will have the most impact in your workplace and are the most realistic.

- In your work plan, remember to consider how you will engage employees when implementing the tools.

Effective work plans include:

- Description of key issues
- Goals and objectives which are Specific, Measurable, Acceptable, Realistic and Timely (S.M.A.R.T.)
- Key strategies for how you will make the work plan happen
- Committee members roles and involvement
- Resources required
- Specify responsibilities and designate individuals to actions
- Expected timelines
- Indicators of success

For more information about creating a work plan:

Alberta Centre for Active Living – Physical Activity @ Work – Developing an Action Plan <http://www.centre4activeliving.ca/workplace/steps/planning/step5.html>

Project Health – a webpage dedicated to links to many resources related to creating workplace work plans <http://www.projecthealth.ca/understanding-workplace-health/developing-workplace-wellness-plans>

Heart & Stroke Foundation of New Brunswick – Wellness at Heart Toolkit http://www.heartandstroke.nb.ca/site/c.kpIPKZOyFkG/b.4835889/k.95A2/Workplace_Wellness_Toolkit.htm

3.4 Implement and Evaluate

Long-term successes can be difficult to measure due to confounding factors (i.e. age, gender, genetics, and environmental factors) and the fact that it may take decades for problems related to inactivity to appear. Therefore, consider process indicators and short-term outcomes measures that will indicate if your program has been successful.

When evaluating any health promotion activity there are two types of success indicators that are commonly used – process and outcome. Determine what should be measured to tell if your initiative is successful.

Process indicators include successes such as: representation from all stakeholder groups, how the program was implemented (e.g., designated people were able to carry out their assigned activities), participation rates and satisfaction with the program. Try to identify what worked and what did not work in your workplace.

Outcome measures show whether the program met its objectives such as: increased physical activity knowledge, intentions of behaviour change, participation rates in physical activity initiatives, positive environmental changes, physical activity policy development and implementation, as well as improvements in absenteeism rates, disability claims, WSIB claims, prescription drug costs and other relevant measures.

Evaluation of your workplace wellness initiatives is a very important step in your wellness programming cycle that should not be overlooked. This information will help you identify your successes, modify your future wellness strategies to best meet the needs of your employees and may help to justify continuing or expanding your activities.

For more information about implementation and evaluation:

Alberta Centre for Active Living – Physical Activity @ Work – How do you know when you are successful?

<http://www.centre4activeliving.ca/workplace/steps/evaluating.html>

Heart & Stroke Foundation of New Brunswick – Wellness at Heart Toolkit -

http://www.heartandstroke.nb.ca/site/c.kplPKZOyFkG/b.4835889/k.95A2/Workplace_Wellness_Toolkit.htm

Project Health - a webpage dedicated to links to many resources related to evaluating your workplace health program -

<http://www.projecthealth.ca/understanding-workplace-health/evaluation>

Don't forget to celebrate your successes! Even if things didn't work out as you expected them to, your wellness committee gained insight into what worked and what didn't which will help you move forward with future programming!



3.5 If We Know It's Good for Them, Can't We Just Make the Changes?

Each workplace is unique. No one solution will work for all workplaces. When making decisions that have an effect on employees, it is important to conduct a needs assessment to ensure the employees in your workplace have an opportunity to indicate what is important to them. By involving employees and other stakeholders you may be able to reduce barriers and resistance to health initiatives.

A Committee Approach

A committee approach is useful when creating a needs assessment as well as when developing health promotion strategies. A health committee should involve representation from all stakeholders including: management, health promotion staff, employees, and if applicable, union representation.

Studies have shown that employees appreciate workplace health promotion programs. Successful initiatives often indicate program acceptance was achieved using a health committee approach.⁴⁷⁻⁵⁰

Ideas for Engaging Employees

- Choose a program that addresses issues people are interested in
- Identify and invite employee 'health champions' to be a part of your initiative
- Involve employees in the decision-making process
- Consider what will make it easy for employees to participate
- Use marketing strategies
- Use incentives, competitions and social support

Canadian Fact

A Canadian study found 81% of responding companies with 50 or more employees stated that the physical activity behaviour of employees is a matter of interest and responsibility for both the employee and the employer.

But, 66% of responding companies indicated that employees have little or no input in the development of physical activity policies, programs or opportunities in their workplace.

Reference: Canadian Fitness & Lifestyle Research Institute (2008). Valuing an active workplace. Working to Become Active Bulletin 7.

For more information about engaging employees and forming employee committees:

Alberta Centre for Active Living – Physical Activity @ Work – Forming an Employee Committee - <http://www.centre4activeliving.ca/workplace/steps/planning/step2.html>

Canadian Council on Health and Active Living at Work - Making it Work: Active Living in the Workplace (see Appendix E, page 54 for a sample Terms of Reference for an Employee Committee) - http://www.cchalw.ca/english/info/Making_It_Work_Eng%20_2.pdf





4.0 A Comprehensive Approach to Physical Activity Programming

4.0 A Comprehensive Approach to Physical Activity Programming

It is important to consider a comprehensive set of health promotion strategies when developing your workplace wellness initiatives. A comprehensive approach to wellness programming includes the inclusion of all four key health promotion approaches:

Awareness Raising	Providing information to employees about the benefits of making healthy choices.
Skill Building	Educating employees about a health issue and assisting them in developing the necessary skills to support a healthy choice.
Supportive Environment	A supportive environment includes ongoing, sustainable activities which make it easier for employees to make healthier choices and participate in healthy behaviours.
Policy Development	Workplace policies demonstrate an organization’s commitment to employee well-being. Policies clarify roles and responsibilities and introduce supports that help employees make healthy choices.

Read through each of these four strategies. Decide how they can be applied in your workplace to support your employees to be more active. Afterward, you can begin to develop your physical activity plan ensuring you are addressing all four areas.

4.1 Awareness Raising

Since a large proportion of the population are employed, and often spend much of their waking hours at work, companies are an ideal place to increase awareness about the benefits of physical activity. According to a survey of Canadian workers,⁵ employers use many different methods (e.g., bulletin boards, newsletters, seminars, workshops) to provide information about how to become more active and where to be active locally.

Raising awareness increases the employee's level of knowledge and interest. It is essential to any program that aims to increase employee activity levels. It is important, since it serves to set the stage for actual programming. Awareness activities can also support other activities that surround a supportive environment or act as a pre-cursor to skill building activities.⁵¹

Awareness raising activities include:⁵¹

- Distributing health promotion print materials (e.g., posters, buttons, etc.)
- Providing self-assessment resources on physical activity (e.g. current physical activity level)
- Publicizing support group programs available in the community (e.g. weight management, fitness, etc.)
- Inviting representatives from various disease prevention organizations to speak to employees about the importance of physical activity in preventing chronic diseases (e.g. cancer, heart, lung, etc.)

It may help to conduct an employee survey to assess current levels of physical activity, what employees already know and what physical activity topics would be most relevant.

Canadian Fact

41% of companies with 50 or more employees reported providing information about how to be active for health benefits, but in a separate study only 28 % of working Canadians indicated that their employers provided this information.

This shows that while information may be made available, it is not always received or remembered by employees. There may be many reasons for this, including that some employees may already be active, may already know the information or they may not be ready to act on such information.

References: Cragg et al, 2007; Canadian Fitness & Lifestyle Research Institute (2008)

Workplaces are encouraged to:⁵²

1. Obtain and provide appropriate tools and resources to promote physical activity. There are many existing tools and resources that can be used or adapted. One such resource is Canada's Physical Activity Guide to Healthy Active Living (<http://www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/hp-ps/hl-mvs/pag-gap/index-eng.php>).
2. Involve experts and professionals to motivate employees. Guest speakers can help motivate employees with regard to specific aspects of physical activity. Companies can also encourage employees to discuss physical activity with their occupational health and safety staff, community recreation staff or other health care professionals.
3. Consider arranging individual health screening which provides employees with an opportunity to learn about their current health status and receive personalized information about the health benefits of physical activity.
4. Provide targeted messages. This can be accomplished by using a variety of resources with different types of messages. This will allow employees at varying levels of readiness for physical activity to receive a message appropriate for them.

It is important to remember that simply increasing awareness of employees on its own will not necessarily result in increased activity levels. Awareness raising is more effective when it is clear what employees are to do with the information and the workplace has activities and other supports in place to make it easier for them to act on the information.

Examples of Awareness Raising Activities for Workplaces

Bulletin Boards and Poster Displays⁵³

Bulletin boards and poster displays are meant to grab attention and provide short, focused pieces of information.

- Post in areas where staff usually go (e.g., water fountains, kitchenette/cafeteria, staff rooms, elevators, stairwells, washrooms)
- Change items on a regular basis
- Make sure details are kept up-to-date
- Include “take-away” items (e.g., pamphlets, bookmarks, etc.)



Demonstration Activities⁵³

Demonstration activities allow people to visually see a particular program or activity. This may help to overcome some people's reluctance to participate. Many people won't try a program or activity if they are not familiar with it.

- Offer demonstrations at varying times to make it easy for as many employees as possible to attend (e.g., different shifts, different worksites, etc.)
- Provide a healthy snack and offer draw prizes
- Include demonstrations during regularly scheduled meetings, stretch breaks, etc.
- Invite input from employees on how a particular program or activity could be implemented



Newsletters⁵³

Newsletter articles and inserts can serve many purposes (e.g., enhance support among workers, provide information/education, promote activities or special events, and help support a corporate culture that encourages physical activity).

- Be clear about the purpose of the article (e.g., inform, educate, promote)
- Use an active headline that grabs the reader
- Identify any employees who will not be reached by a newsletter and explore other options to reach them
- Include content that addresses the interests and concerns of the employees
- Use clear language; avoid using complicated terms
- Consider recognizing employees who find ways to be creative with getting active or other achievements
- Tie content to larger processes or events that are happening in the workplace (e.g., during year end budget time, focus on the importance of building in small bursts of physical activity during the day as a stress management tool)

Point-of-Decision Prompts

Point-of-decision prompts are meant to remind people that they have a choice. With physical activity, the prompt encourages people to choose an activity that uses more physical energy. One of the most common physical activity point-of-decision prompts invites people to use the stairs instead of the elevator or escalator.

In order for employees to make “the active choice”, the environment needs to be inviting. Employees are more likely to choose the stairs if they only have to go up 1-4 floors.⁵⁴ For stairway promotion programs, stairs should be:⁵⁵

- Easy to find, not out of the normal traffic flow
- Well-lit and maintained to ensure safety
- Inviting (e.g., paint colour, music, inspirational posters, etc.)



An easy to use program to encourage employees to use the stairs is *Stairway to Health* developed by the Public Health Agency of Canada and the Canadian Council for Healthy and Active Living. Free, downloadable posters, interactive tools and other resources are available online at <http://www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/sth-evs/english/index-eng.php>.

4.2 Skill Building

Once employees' awareness and knowledge about the importance of physical activity is increased it is important to plan activities that will assist them to develop skills to improve and maintain their physical activity levels.

Assisting employees to develop the skills they need for physical activity helps them develop a sense of confidence, prevents injuries and encourages active living. It is not uncommon for adults to have never had the opportunity to participate in sports as children.⁵³

Skill development activities include:^{51, 56}

- Workshops on goal setting and creating a physical activity plan (or fitness testing or physical activity counseling)
- Instruction on how to take part in physical activity (e.g., brisk walking programs, cycling, swimming, desk exercising and stretching etc.) in a fun and safe way
- Participation in contests or challenges that enable employees to try out a type of physical activity (e.g., walking challenge, stair climbing challenge)
- Participation in educational programs such as learning how to monitor one's own heart rate during activity; using a pedometer
- A course in time management and how to build physical activity into a busy day

Canadian Fact

A 2006 survey of working Canadians on the availability of fitness instruction or counseling at work, found:

- 14% of respondents had access to fitness testing or physical activity counseling
- 12% of respondents had access to instruction in developing personal fitness or physical activity programs
- 11% had access to instruction for specific activities

Reference: Cragg et al, 2007

Workplaces are encouraged to:⁵²

1. Plan a variety of skill building activities that address the needs of employees and help remove barriers to participation
2. Allow employees to try out activities they may not have experienced before.
3. Provide targeted advice through individual counseling or group information session. Within this, employees can be guided to set realistic goals for themselves that help them to strive for an appropriate work-life balance that includes physical activity

Examples of Skill Building Activities for Workplaces

Goal Setting

Physical activity guidelines do not provide enough information for individuals to decide how to become more active. Helping employees learn how to create their own personal goals along with how they would like to attain them is an important activity. There are resources available to help:

For more information:

Act Now BC – S.M.A.R.T. Goal-Setting: *Get to Where You Want to Be*

www.actnowbc.ca/adults/s.m.a.r.t._goal_setting

This website includes examples of goals that are S.M.A.R.T. (Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Realistic and Time-oriented) as well as a number of downloadable worksheets to help individual employees create their own active living goals.

Kinect Australia, Better Health Channel – *Physical Activity, Setting Yourself Goals*

www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au/bhcv2/bhcarticles.nsf/pages/Physical_activity_set_yours_elf_goals?OpenDocument

This website provides an overview of principles for goal-setting, tips for writing goals,

Canadian Mental Health Association: *Minding Our Bodies*

www.mindingourbodies.ca/toolkit/getting_started/goal_setting

www.mindingourbodies.ca/toolkit/resources/sample_goal_setting_worksheet

This website provides information on goal setting and provides tips for writing S.M.A.R.T. goals related to physical activity. The second links takes you directly to their worksheet

Exercise Breaks

Short exercise breaks (approximately 5-10 minutes long) have been used in factory settings in Japan and Europe for many years. These workplaces have found benefits include reducing fatigue and stress while improving work efficiency. In Canadian workplaces they are less common, but are successful. These breaks can be structured or casual, with volunteer employees being trained to properly lead the routine. Workplaces can videotape the routine for workers to use on their own.⁵³



Activity Challenge Events

Contests or challenges are a great way to get people interested in active living. These can be done in teams (e.g., between departments, randomly assigned, etc.) or by individuals challenging themselves.



Team based challenges could include:

- An active transportation challenge where worksites or departments are rewarded for the percentage of employees who use active transportation to get to and from work
 - A wheelchair basketball challenge, involving both able-bodied and workers with a disability
 - Interdepartmental sports days
 - Fundraising events that sponsor others to jog, swim, or shoot basketball hoops
 - An active living challenge where team members track the amount and type of activities they do over a given time period. Teams can win prizes or incentives for most number of steps, most variety of activities, etc.
- A walking challenge where teams accumulate enough steps to walk to a specific destination (e.g., companies with multiple worksites or offices could have a walking route that includes stops at the different sites.) This can be a great opportunity to profile different offices and where they are located.

For more information:

British Heart Foundation

www.bhf.org.uk/HealthAtWork/getting_active_at_work/active_at_work_challenges/be_active_challenge.aspx

Winnipeg in Motion

www.winnipeginmotion.ca/work/step_by_step_walk_for_wellness_challenge/

Individual challenges could include:

- A 10,000 steps challenge where employees track their steps and set goals to increase their steps by a realistic amount each week with an ultimate goal of attaining and sustaining 10,000 steps each day. The British Heart Foundation has a Pedometer Challenge that is based on the concept of achieving 10,000 steps that can be used either with teams or individuals.
www.bhf.org.uk/HealthAtWork/getting_active_at_work/active_at_work_challenges/pedometer_challenge.aspx
- *Walk This Way*, a self-help walking kit to help employees build walking into their daily routine. For more information about this program and its available resources, visit the Physical Activity Resource Centre website at: parc.ophea.net/walk-way

Workstation Activities

Stretches and simple exercises that employees can do throughout the day can help build their flexibility and strength. Online resources can be made available as links on your company's intranet or employee portal.



For more information:

The Alberta Centre for Active Living (www.centre4activeliving.ca/workplace/en click on videos):

- [Exercising Your Hands and Wrists @ Your Desk](#)
- [Stretching @ Your Desk](#)
- [Yoga @ Your Desk](#)

A number of posters and print resources are also available including:

- Stretching Poster – Windsor-Essex County Health Unit - www.wechealthunit.org/workplace-health/initiatives/posters/stretching_generic_small_poster2.pdf
- Worksite Exercises – University of Toronto Environmental Health and Safety - www.ehs.utoronto.ca/services/Ergonomics/exercise.htm

4.3 Supportive Environment

Getting employees to try an activity is only part of the solution to having them stay active. Employees who perceive that their work environment is not supportive of them being active will not stay active. A supportive environment works to reduce barriers for employees initiating or maintaining an active lifestyle.

There are two components to a supportive workplace, the physical environment and the social environment. It is important to address both components to increase the chances of your program being successful.

Effective interventions within the *physical environment* include:

- Provision of space and equipment for physical activity (e.g., fitness rooms, treadmills, elliptical machines, etc.)^{10, 55-60}
- Access to lockers, showers, bicycle racks^{55, 58, 59, 61}
- Access to external places and opportunities for physical activity (e.g., fitness facilities as well as spaces not traditionally used for physical activity like community centres, churches, etc.)^{55-58, 61}
- A work environment arranged to encourage movement throughout the day (e.g., shared printer a short distance away from desks)⁵⁵

Canadian Fact

81% of working Canadians report having access to fitness facilities in their workplace

32% have access to showers at work while 40 % say they have access to change areas or locker rooms

55% say their workplaces are near pleasant places to walk or jog and 49% report community fitness/sports facilities near work with 20% reporting access to other community facilities

References: Canadian Fitness and Lifestyle Research Institute, 2008; Cragg et al, 2007

Ensuring there are resources in the physical environment will not necessarily help employees maintain physical activity. Social and group activities can help provide motivation and reinforcement for employees to stay active.

A supportive *social environment* can include:

- Peer support (e.g., walking groups, team competitions)^{55, 56, 58, 61}
- Professional guidance for ongoing support^{10, 59}
- Involvement of employees' families⁵⁵

According to the Canadian Fitness and Lifestyle Research Institute there are other things that can enhance a supportive workplace. These activities and events include:^{5, 52}

- Recreational activities either during the work day or outside of it (e.g., golf tournaments, ski trips, etc.)
- Company wide events (e.g., Sneaker Day, Corporate Challenge, Healthy Workplace Week)
- Rewards, incentives or other recognition for physical activity achievements

Workplaces are encouraged to:⁵²

- Promote active commuting
- Promote easy and economical options for physical activity
- Investigate sharing of facilities with other organizations or businesses
- Provide a variety of opportunities
- Be inclusive (e.g., open activities up to full and part-time employees, contract workers, retirees, other family members)
- Promote alternative facilities for physical activity
- Promote existing resources
- Offer rewards or incentives for participation

Canadian Fact

Only 15% of working Canadians report having fitness testing or physical activity counseling at their workplaces; however 27 % of mid-to-large companies report these services

35% of workers and employers say other family members may make use of workplace fitness opportunities

References: Canadian Fitness and Lifestyle Research Institute, 2008; Cragg et al, 2007

Canadian Fact

69% of mid-to-large companies say they offer have recreational events such as golf tournaments & ski trips while 47% per cent report team sports

31% of mid-to-large companies report involvement with special events like Sneaker Day

10% of workers report the availability of rewards or other recognition for physical activity achievements

References: Canadian Fitness and Lifestyle Research Institute, 2008; Cragg et al, 2007

Examples of Supportive Environment Activities for Workplaces

Walking Groups

Supporting the formation of walking groups can be a simple, yet effective way to enable employees to get more active. Walking is the most popular type of physical activity for Canadians.⁶² It is inexpensive and can be done almost anywhere. As a result, the formation of walking groups within a workplace does not require many resources.

Elements of effective workplace walking programs:⁶³⁻⁶⁶

- Target specific needs of employees or groups of staff
- Include training so staff know how to participate
- Offer multiple ways to participate (e.g., organized group as well as individual walks)
- Make optimal use of existing resources (e.g., local walking paths)
- Incorporate tools for goal setting, self-monitoring and motivation (e.g., pedometers, tracking forms/logs)
- Provide motivational messages to employees (e.g., weekly emails)

For more information:

Walk BC – Workplace Walking Kit

<http://walkbc.ca/free-kit-start-workplace-walking-program>

A website that contains handbooks, posters, other tools and resources.

Huron-Perth In Motion – Step Into Motion

<http://www.hpinmotion.ca/work/>

A workplace Walking Program that contains both a Coordinator's Guide and a Participant Guide.

U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention – Worksite Walkability

<http://www.cdc.gov/nccdphp/dnpao/hwi/toolkits/walkability/index.htm>

This website contains information about conducting a walkability audit to broadly assess pedestrian facilities, destinations and surroundings along and near a walking route and identify specific improvements to make the route more attractive and useful.

Incentives

While the health benefits of being active are incentives on their own, many people also enjoy winning a t-shirt or being mentioned in the company newsletter. It is important to identify the purpose of any incentive that is offered (e.g., get employees to try something new, encouragement to continue or maintain activity levels for a longer time period). It is also important that the incentives you choose are in keeping with your workplace wellness goals (i.e., avoid mixed messages such as providing unhealthy food items or vouchers for free tanning bed coupons).

According to the U.S. Centres for Disease Control and Prevention, Lean Works program (www.cdc.gov/leanworks/promote/incentives.html), workplaces need to be strategic in what incentives are chosen and how they are used.⁶⁷ They offer the following tips:

- Identify the incentives your employees value most
- Identify the incentives your organization can provide
- Consider whether to offer incentives for both participation and goal achievement
- Avoid offering incentives for the "best," the "most," or physical changes such as number of pounds lost
- Consider ways in which you can integrate incentives into your organization's benefits strategy, such as offering a reduction in health care premiums

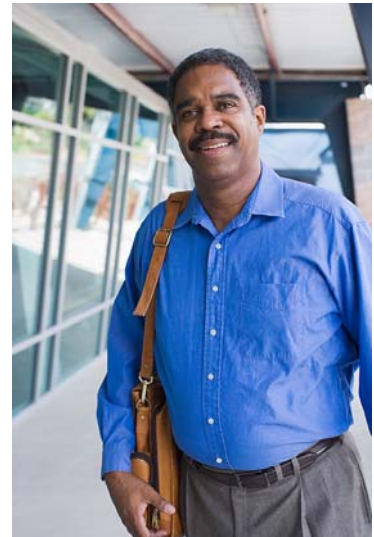
Active Transportation

Active transportation includes walking, cycling, and taking public transit.

Walking: The average person can walk half a kilometer in just over five minutes; if your commute is three kilometers one way, that's 30 minutes each way.

Cycling: Approximately 60 per cent of the population in Ontario is interested in cycling more, but are afraid to ride in traffic.⁶⁸ Cycling education can improve confidence in one's ability to cycle.

Transit: A recent study has found that because transit trips often involve walking to and from stops, users are more likely to meet the recommended 30 minutes of moderate physical activity a day.⁶⁹



Making your workplace conducive to active commuters does not have to involve a large financial investment. Many initiatives can be implemented quickly and easily. Employers who encourage active commuting in their workplace will see many benefits, including a happier and healthier workforce, and better success in the areas of employee recruitment and retention. In addition, increasing the number of people cycling, walking, and taking transit to work can also reduce parking needs by directly reducing demand for parking spaces. Encouraging active and sustainable commuting is one way that businesses can demonstrate their commitment to environmental stewardship.⁷⁰⁻⁷³

For more local information:

Travelwise

www.region.waterloo.on.ca/travelwise

A website with a comprehensive list of transportation-related Regional services, projects and links to relevant external sites.

EasyGO

www.grt.ca/web/transit.nsf/vwArticles/TE-GR-ROU-LIN-2100?OpenDocument

EasyGo trip planner helps you get where you want to go. For your best route and schedule, check out Grand River Transit's trip planner to get you to work or to your next business meeting.

GRT Corporate Pass

www.grt.ca/web/transit.nsf/DocID/37D2563FF90766D08525751D0056AA10?OpenDocument

Enjoy a corporate rate transit pass for employees when an employer signs up for the corporatepass program with Grand River Transit. This convenient payroll deduction program is the easiest way to take transit.

Other Resources:

Canadian Cycling Association –

www.canadian-cycling.com/cca/education/canbike.shtml

This organization accredits the CAN-BIKE bike skills training program in Canada.

City of Toronto - www.toronto.ca/bug/index.htm

Learn more about urban cycling including resources on how to start and maintain a Bicycle User Group in your workplace (a group that works to improve conditions for cycling in their workplace or who wish to commute together).

National Centre for Biking and Walking – *Increasing Physical Activity Through Community Design* http://www.bikewalk.org/pdfs/2010/IPA_full.pdf

This guide tells you how to help create places for people to walk and bicycle. This doesn't just mean special trails, though those might certainly be an important element of an overall plan. Creating an active community environment means taking a look at the broader scope of where there are, and are not, opportunities to safely walk and bicycle.

4.4 Policy Development

Physical activity policies have many purposes. They can:⁷⁴

- Create a “corporate culture” that encourages, supports and celebrates employees who are active
- Demonstrate how your company values a healthy work force
- Educate employees about the benefits of physical activity
- Change social/cultural norms where it is normal to sit for the bulk of a work day (often 8 hours)

You can develop policies that address physical activity directly (e.g., active transportation, participation in physical activity events; reimbursement subsidies) or indirectly (e.g., job flexibility).

Before you start to write a new policy, create an inventory of existing policies that benefit employees participating in physical activity or create barriers to participation.

Writing a Physical Activity Policy Step-by-Step⁷⁵

1. Inform and consult your workforce
2. Develop the policy
3. Launch the policy
4. Monitor and review

Canadian Fact

Canadian employers with 50 or more employees report having the following formal policies:

- Working from home (9%)
- Job-sharing (14%)
- Flexible work hours(21%)
- Dress down days or casual dress codes (32%)
- Extended lunch hours (4%)
- Employee participation in special physical activity events during work (14%)

While only a minority of companies have these formal policies, others have informal policies for these same supports.

Reference: Canadian Fitness and Lifestyle Research Institute, 2008.

Workplaces are encouraged to:⁵²

- Create or review policies related to job flexibility (e.g., job-sharing, flextime, extended lunch hours, working from home). If these policies exist informally, consider formalizing them.
- Adopt policies that focus specifically on physical activity. Consider the following:⁷⁶
 - allow time specifically for physical activity
 - formally recognizing participation in programs
 - develop commuting policies
 - recruit qualified personnel for the program
 - involve all employees, including nonpermanent and shift workers
- Ensure adequate training for all managers, supervisors and other key staff members



Examples of Policies

Health at Work, Scotland: *A Guide to Writing and Implementing a Physical Activity Policy in the workplace*

www.healthatwork.org.uk/pdf.pl?file=haw/file/shawsilver/Physical_Activity_Policy.pdf

This resource provides a comprehensive physical activity policy.

Healthy Living at Work, Lambton County, Ontario: *Workplace Action Guide*

www.lambtonhealth.on.ca/workplace/PDF/WAG_2008_COMPLETE_rev_web.pdf

This resource contains a mix of sample policies including flexible hours (page 85), Active Living Facility Program (page 86), Healthy Commuting (page 87)

Choices 4 Health – Halton, Ontario

www.choices4health.org/pages/Networks/Active+Halton/Workplace+Health.html

This website provides a list of links to numerous workplace policies that address physical activity both directly and indirectly.

Alberta Centre for Active Living: *Active Living @ Work: Ideas for the Policy Level: How Company Policies Can Help Everyone to be Active*

<http://www.centre4activeliving.ca/workplace/ideas/policy.html>

This resource provides many ideas of various workplace policies that support employees to be physically active, both formal and informal.



5.0 Special Considerations

5.1 Physical Activity Before and During Pregnancy

Within Canadian workplaces, women constitute nearly half of the workforce with over 75% in their prime childbearing years.⁷⁷ Eight out of ten women will become pregnant during their working years and most of these women will continue to work during their pregnancy.^{78, 79} There are special physical activity considerations around pregnancy to be aware of and the workplace environment plays an important role in overall activity levels.



Do you have prospective parents at your workplace? Women and men planning future pregnancies and healthy pregnant women are encouraged to participate in regular physical activity. Since 2003, the Society of Obstetricians and Gynecologists (SOGC) and the Canadian Society for Exercise Physiology (CSEP) have encouraged all women with uncomplicated pregnancies to participate in endurance and strength activities.⁸⁰

Benefits of physical activity in pregnancy:

- Fewer discomforts of pregnancy
- Improved mental health and self-esteem
- Decreased risk for depression and anxiety
- Promotion of appropriate weight gain in pregnancy
- Improved control of gestational diabetes
- Improved cardiovascular fitness

As well, regular physical activity during pregnancy may:

- Help to prevent pregnancy-induced hypertension
- Decrease the invasiveness of interventions in labour
- Facilitate quicker recovery after birth

Physical activity during pregnancy has many benefits beyond those related to the pregnancy itself. It will benefit the woman physically, emotionally and mentally. For workplaces this translates into employees who are less likely to require time off for pregnancy related discomforts/illnesses and will be more productive when at work. It will also benefit the well-being of her family, as active parents tend to have active children.

Considerations for Workplaces

Regular job activities should also be considered when taking stock of overall activity levels. While pregnancy is a normal process, it brings physical and physiological changes which may require consideration in the workplace.

There may be risks associated with prolonged standing, sitting, heavy lifting and shift work. These risks include low birth weight in the newborn and preterm birth. Activities that could result in falls, injury to the abdomen, pressure changes such as changes in altitude, continuous vibrations and noise, or repetitive stress injuries should be assessed.⁸¹

It is advisable that if your pregnant employee has concerns about work-related activities, these should be discussed with their health care provider.



Women are strongly encouraged to discuss their physical activity levels with their health care providers on a regular basis.

All pregnant women considering an exercise program are encouraged to review the PARmed-X for Pregnancy with their health care provider (see CSEP website link on page 56) on a regular basis throughout pregnancy.

The PARmed-X for Pregnancy also takes into consideration occupational activity levels.

Additional support is available through the Exercise and Pregnancy Hotline at Women's College Hospital – 1-866-937-7678. This research-based resource is easily accessible by both employee and employer.

Health Promotion Strategies

Awareness Raising:

- Promote the benefits of appropriate physical activity prior to pregnancy for men and women to increase fertility and encourage optimum health
- Display pamphlets and resources that promote physical activity in pregnancy
- Incorporate recommendations for an active pregnancy into existing employee communications (e.g., newsletters, emails, intranet/employee web portal)
- Promote websites with appropriate information for physical activity in pregnancy

Skill Building

- Encourage pregnant women who sit at desks to set realistic goals with appropriate actions to ensure they move regularly, at least every 2 hours (e.g. pop-up reminder on hand-held devices and/or computer)
- Display images of proper lifting technique

Environmental Support

- Encourage and allow pregnant women who spend a lot of time standing to take regular breaks to elevate their feet
- Provide a place where pregnant women can rest on their breaks
- Facilitate pregnant women coming together for physical activity
- Refer women and men to the Region of Waterloo Public Health, Reproductive Health Line (519-883-2267) for information on local services and resources regarding physical activity related to preconception and pregnancy
- Promote local walking routes in the surrounding area of 30 minutes or less
- Ensure the workplace offers healthy nutritious foods to sustain a healthy pregnancy for women who are physically active
- Provide access to trained fitness instructors specializing in pregnancy
- Create workstations that are ergonomically designed and consider the differing body size and proportion of pregnant women
- Accommodate alternate work assignments if current work involves heavy lifting, strenuous work, shift work, long hours of work
- Install anti-vibration floor matting or handle insulation to reduce effects of vibration for pregnant employees working near heavy machinery, on vibrating platforms or with powered hand tools



Policy Development

- Allow for flexible work schedules to encourage regular physical activity during pregnancy
- Allow time off work for pregnant women to consult with a health care provider regarding the recommended level of physical activity
- Create a light duty policy
- Create other supportive policies (e.g., flex time, part-time, telecommuting and job sharing)

For more information:

Canadian Society for Exercise Physiology (CSEP)

www.csep.ca/english/view.asp?x=698

This site contains forms and information to be used by the individual and the health care provider to assess readiness for exercise programs for people with special considerations. The PARmed-X for Pregnancy questionnaires is also available from this website.

Healthy U Alberta - *Benefits of Physical Activity During and After Pregnancy*

<http://www.healthyalberta.com/ActiveLiving/875.htm>

Women's College Hospital - *Sport CARE - Exercise and Pregnancy Helpline*

<http://www.womenscollegehospital.ca/programs/program147.html>

This is a free service offering information to any pregnant or pre-pregnant woman and others who have questions related to exercise during pregnancy. This includes athletes, active women, workplaces, health care providers and those who want to begin an exercise routine during pregnancy.

Joint SOGC/CSEP Clinical Practice Guideline: Exercise in Pregnancy & Postpartum

Period, <http://www.sogc.org/guidelines/public/129E-JCPG-June2003.pdf>

Occupational Health Clinics for Ontario Workers, Inc – *Pregnant Women Face Unique Ergonomic Risk Factors,*

<http://www.ohcow.on.ca/enews/vol1iss1/pregoergo.html>

Ontario Human Rights Commission – *Policy on Discrimination Because of Pregnancy and Breastfeeding*

<http://www.ohrc.on.ca/en/resources/Policies/PolicyPregBreastfeedEN/pdf>

5.2 Employees with Activity Limitations

According to the World Health Organization, a disability is “any restriction or lack of the ability to perform and activity due to impairment.”⁸² Activity limitations are one aspect of disability. “Activity limitations are imposed by a condition or by a long term physical or mental health problem that has lasted (or is expected to last) six months or more”.²⁰

In 2003, almost one-third (32.5 per cent) of people in Waterloo Region reported some amount of long term activity limitation due to a physical or mental health problem.⁸³ Less than half (46.3 per cent) of these people were working.⁸³

Research shows that individuals with activity limitations are at greater risk of developing some chronic diseases with the effects of these conditions being more severe than the general population.⁸⁴ Active living is important for someone with an activity limitation to:⁸⁴

- Increase their overall health
- Reduce the risk of developing illnesses or conditions that are linked to a sedentary lifestyle
- Reduce the risk of developing secondary conditions specific to their type of disability
- Make daily living easier
- Increase overall quality of life

Inclusion involves “meaningful participation while learning new skills, with every participant accepted and supported by peers”.⁸⁴

Successful inclusion occurs when:⁸⁴

- Activities are modified and individualized when necessary
- Expectations are realistic yet challenging
- Assistance is provided only to the degree required



Health Promotion Strategies

There are many ways workplace physical activity promotion can accommodate employees with activity limitations. These include:

Awareness Raising

- Ensure physical activity messaging is accessible to employees who may have sensory impairments (e.g., visually impaired, hearing impaired, etc.)
- Include the benefits of physical activity for everyone (including those with activity limitations)

Skill Building

- Consult with employees with activity limitations or key resources in the community about how to modify your physical activity plans or initiatives to accommodate the needs of employees with activity limitations
- Encourage employees to set realistic goals with appropriate action steps that take their individual abilities into account

Supportive Environment

- Involve an appropriate expert when designing fitness spaces; select equipment that will accommodate a range of abilities
- Modify participation rules and procedures to accommodate varying levels of ability
- Ensure employees with activity limitations are included on wellness committees or staff working groups

Policy Development

- Include physical activity programs and initiatives for your staff in your company's accessibility plans



For more information:

Active Living Alliance for Canadians with a Disability – *All Abilities Welcome Toolkit*
<http://www.allabilitieswelcome.ca/en/toolkits.htm>

Order a toolkit free of charge from this weblink. This toolkit contains information about how to include people with varying levels of abilities in physical activity programs and initiatives.

Canadian Hearing Society – *Services for Employers*
<http://www.chs.ca/en/for-employers/services-for-employers.html>

Employer consultations are available to assist workplaces in creating accommodations in the workplace and facilitating employer/employee communication.

Canadian National Institute for the Blind (CNIB), *Accessibility Consulting* -
<http://www.accesscontent.ca/>

CNIB accessibility consultants can provide you with the tools and information you need to make your business more inclusive.

Healthy U, Government of Alberta - *Physical activity for people with mobility issues or disabilities*

<http://www.healthyalberta.com/ActiveLiving/882.htm>

A website that contains information about the benefits of physical activity for those with activity limitations and suggestions for how these people can accommodate all three types of physical activity into their lives.



5.3 Employees Who Work Shifts

It is estimated that approximately 25 per cent of workers in Canada work rotating shifts.⁸⁵ Many people enjoy shift work, while others feel it is “just part of the job.” No matter which category shift workers fall into, it can be difficult for these workers to find balance, energy and strength to work safely. As a result, shift work can decrease opportunities for physical activity and participation in sports.⁸⁶

It is not uncommon for shift workers to experience:⁸⁷

- Higher levels of sleep problems and fatigue
- Twice the likelihood of cardiovascular disease after five years of shift work
- Eight times the occurrence of gastrointestinal disorders such as ulcers
- Difficulty controlling chronic diseases such as diabetes and epilepsy
- Increased consumption of unhealthy foods, caffeine and cigarettes
- Increased levels of drug and alcohol misuse
- Higher rates of divorce and spousal abuse
- Less time spent with family and friends
- An increased sense of personal isolation



The health of shift workers can significantly affect a company’s bottom line. As a result, workplaces may experience:⁸⁷

- An increase in industrial injuries due to worker fatigue, with the most serious injuries happening between the hours of 2:00 a.m. and 6:00 a.m.
- An increase in motor vehicle crashes
- An increase in organizational health care expenses
- A higher level of employee turnover, leading to an increase in hiring and training costs

Employees who work shifts may benefit from physical activity because it can be refreshing and help boost energy as well as increase alertness on the job. These employees may present unique challenges for physical activity promotion because they generally live their lives on a different schedule however, they may have time available when others do not.

Health Promotion Strategies

There are many things an employer can do to promote and support physical activity among shift workers. These include:

Awareness Raising:

- Display posters in areas where shift workers frequently access
- Posters should promote the benefits of physical activity and how to be physically active during their shifts (e.g., 10-20 minutes of brisk walking on a meal break)
- Offer informational sessions and health screenings during non-traditional working hours

Skill Building:

- Provide employees with tools or resources to help them set physical activity goals for themselves
- Provide employees with tools to monitor their own physical activity, at work and during leisure time (e.g., pedometers, tracking forms)

Supportive Environment:

- Provide rebates or other financial incentives for employees to be active during leisure time
- Encourage employees to create a “buddy system” with other colleagues who work the same shifts
- Map out an indoor walking route at the workplace
- Create a fitness area within the workplace

Policy:

- Include shift workers and their unique needs in any physical activity policies

For more information:

Healthy U, Government of Alberta – Shift Work: Getting Enough Sleep and Physical Activity (www.healthyalberta.com/HealthyPlaces/685.htm)

Shifting to Wellness (<http://www.shiftingtowellness.ca/>)



6.0 References

6.0 References

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