

Physical Activity

Background Information/Rationale for Focus

Lack of physical activity contributes to heart disease, adult-onset diabetes, colon cancer, high blood pressure, obesity, osteoporosis, depression, and stroke ¹. Research reports that 51 per cent of Canadians aged 20 or older are inactive ². Because of sedentary lifestyles, most adults are also at risk for preventable chronic diseases.

In Waterloo Region, less than a quarter (25 per cent) of Waterloo Region residents have adopted healthy practices such as moderate exercise and not smoking. That's one of the findings of a recently released study by the Canadian Population Health Initiative, which examined the health of people in cities across Canada.³

Active living is a key determinant of health and well-being and Active Living Policies make good business sense⁴. Workplace physical activity programs have been found to increase productivity by up to 52% and reduce sick leave by up to 32%.⁵



Benefits of physical activity include:

- Better posture and balance;
- Weight control;
- More energy;
- Reduced stress/relaxation;
- Improved fitness and self-esteem; and,
- Stronger muscles and bones.

With 15 million Canadians spending one-half of their waking hours at work, it is vital to find ways of increasing physical activity at and around work. Good workplace practices, including access to physical activity in the workplace and cafeterias with healthy foods, are increasingly important to an organization's success because they can help organizations access the best and brightest workforce.⁶

The benefits to physical activity extend beyond the reduction of preventable chronic diseases. Physical activity can also assist with managing stress. Stress is recognized as a contributing factor to workplace illness and sick days. One of the ways organizations can help employees manage stress is to support them to be physically active in and around the workplace.

Goals For The Workplace To Strive For

1. To increase accessibility of physical activity options.
2. To promote physical activity and increase awareness of Canada's Physical Activity Guide to Healthy Active Living.
3. To increase awareness of the relationship between physical activity and health outcomes.
4. To promote physical activity skill building opportunities before, during and after work hours.
5. To provide environmental supports which encourage physical activity.
6. To develop a physical activity policy.

Getting Started

Workplace Wellness Team, Environmental Scan and Needs Assessment

- Create a workplace wellness team, which includes employees and management to gauge your workers needs and interests;
- Complete an environmental scan to determine how supportive the workplace is regarding healthy eating and physical activity;
- Conduct a needs assessment to determine what healthy living initiatives are important to employees; and,
- Based on the results of your environmental scan and needs assessment, consult with the workplace wellness team to decide which interventions fit with the requirements of your workplace.

Awareness Raising

- Utilize bulletin boards and displays featuring resources related to healthy lifestyles and physical activity opportunities. Include information about local recreation centres, fitness facilities, community events etc.;
- Dedicate an accessible area to display pamphlets and resources regarding healthy lifestyle issues and physical activity; and,
- Include short articles in internal newsletters or staff-e-mails (check websites and local newspaper for relevant articles).

Skill Building

- Incorporate presentations/workshops/physical activity challenges based on employee interest through lunch and learn sessions;

Workplace Example:

One idea is to "Walk Across Canada". Have employees team up and keep track of how far they walk. Hang a map of Canada in the lunch/break room to track their progress. The first team to walk "Across Canada" wins a prize.

Physical Activity

- Promote “Deskercise” by encouraging stretching exercise at employee’s desks to reduce strain from sitting, typing and lack of fresh air. Some examples include neck rolls, shoulder shrugs, stomach squeezes, hip twisters, wrist curls and yawning; and,
- Encourage employees to take the stairs instead of the elevator. Stairs require little or no additional time, no additional financial cost, and are required by building code. Ensure stairways are well lit and safe. Hang posters up by the elevators reminding employees to take the stairs. See Stairway to Health website in Resources section.

Creating a Supportive Environment

- Support flexible working hours to allow employees to take advantage of physical activity opportunities;
- Provide education, resources and support for employees;
- Offer incentive programs by subsidizing gym memberships or providing onsite fitness classes and programs to encourage workers to participate, stay motivated, and learn healthy habits;
- Offer physical activity programs (Please contact Project Health staff for more information);
- Encourage walking clubs, workplace recreational leagues, etc. (Offer a variety of options for different ages and abilities);
- Provide a suggestion box so employees can submit topics of interest and feedback on activities;
- Have an outdoor area for staff and provide badminton rackets, birdies, soccer balls, etc. to use during lunch or after work;
- Provide exercise and fitness facilities at work;
- Provide social support for physical activity (eg. Group discounts or subsidies for local fitness facility memberships);
- Provide amenities supporting physical activity(eg. change rooms, bike racks);
- Host company recreational events such as activity days, ski days, golf days, etc.;
- Represent your workplace by participating in various fundraisers for charities (e.g. Heart and Stroke, Cancer Society). This is a great way to be physically active and support a good cause; and,
- Have pedometers available for employees to track their walking progress (see resources available through Project Health section).

Workplace Example:

Start a lunch-hour or before/ after work-walking club. If feasible, provide lockers and showers on site to encourage employees to be active. Supply umbrellas or rain repellent ponchos so employees can still be active in the rain.

Healthy Workplace Policy Suggestions

- Provide flexible work schedules to incorporate physical activity;
- Endorse Business casual work clothing Policy;
- Policy that fitness/stretch breaks will be incorporated into meetings; and,
- Provide an onsite facility promoting physical activity before, during and after work and weekends.



Telephone consultation is available through **Project Health: 519-883-2287**

Region of Waterloo Public Health Resources

Project Health Resources: (call Project Health phone line @ 519-883-2287)

Resources for employers and wellness providers:

“My Turn My Time My Plan” - Physical Activity for Women 50+, Posters and Tear Off Sheet
Walk this Way

Other Services:

Phone consultation for physical activity policy development

Public Health Resource Centre:

To borrow teaching kits/books/video resources please call: 519-883-2256

To order pamphlets: email phrc@region.waterloo.on.ca or call the automated order line at: 519-883-2374 or order online at www.region.waterloo.on.ca/ph -- Resources/Resource Centre/Pamphlets

Books:

Active Living Every Day-20 Weeks to Lifelong Vitality (Blair et al).
Body Break - Keep Fit and Have Fun, (Johnson, H. and McLeod, J.).
Fitness Motivation-Preventing Participant Dropout, (Rejeski, J.,1988)
201 Icebreakers: Group Mixers, Warm-ups, Energizers and Playful Activities, (West, E.).

Pamphlets/Fact Sheets:

Physical Activity Guide - Adults
Getting Active for Life

Posters:

Physical Activity

Kits:

Pedometer Kit

Displays:

Eat healthy. Live active. (generic)
Eat healthy. Live active. (workplace)

Internet Resources

Alberta Centre for Active Living
<http://www.centre4activeliving.ca>

Active Living (Government of Ontario)
<http://www.active2010.ca>

American College of Sports Medicine
<http://www.acsm.org>
Canadian Fitness and Lifestyle Research Institute
<http://www.cflri.ca>

Health Canada – Physical Activity
http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca/hl-vs/physactiv/index_e.html
Canada's Physical Activity Guides <http://www.paguide.com>

The Walking Site
<http://www.thewalkingsite.com/10000steps.html>

Physical Activity Resource Centre
<http://www.ophea.net/parc>

Public Health Agency of Canada – Active Living at Work
<http://www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/pau-uap/fitness/work>

Stairway to Health
<http://www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/sth-evs/english/index.html>

References

- ¹ Health Canada & CSEP. (1998). *Canada's physical activity guide to healthy active living*. Ottawa: Author.
- ² Canadian Fitness and Lifestyle Research Institute. (2007). *Physical activity monitor and sport*. Retrieved from:
<http://www.cflri.ca/eng/statistics/surveys/documents/PAM2005.pdf>
- ³ Canadian Fitness and Lifestyle Research Institute. (1998). *Healthy Living: Physical Activity* <http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca/hl-vs/physactiv/index-eng.php>
- ⁴ Alberta Centre for Active Living. (2007). *Benefits of physical activity at work*. Retrieved September 24, 2009 from:
http://www.centre4activeliving.ca/workplace/beforestart/benefits_bottomline.html

⁵Physical Activity Framework. Alberta Centre for Active Living. Retrieved from:
http://www.centre4activeliving.ca/publications/researchandreports/2003_workplace/Framework.html

⁶Public Health Agency of Canada. (2007). *Business case for active living at work*. Retrieved from:
<http://www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/alw-vat/index-eng.php>



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Supporting Healthy Workplaces