

Physical Activity

Background Information/Rationale for Focus

Canadian Physical Activity Guidelines recommend that Canadian adults should get at least 150 minutes of moderate-to-vigorous physical activity each week, accumulated in bouts of 10 minutes or more.¹ In fact, 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:²⁻⁴

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

While 53 per cent of Canadian adults report being at least moderately active in their leisure time only 15 per cent actually accumulate 150 minutes of moderate-to-vigorous physical activity per week.⁵ 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.⁶

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.

Promoting physical activity and supporting employees to be physically active is not just good for them, it is good for your business. When employees are physically active, your business becomes active in more ways than one:⁷⁻¹⁷

- 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



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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.¹⁷

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.

Getting Started – Utilizing a Variety of Health Promotion Strategies

Awareness Raising¹⁸

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
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.

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Skill Building¹⁸

1. Plan a variety of skill building activities that address the needs of employees and help remove barriers to participation. These could include:^{19, 20}
 - 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
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



Creating Supportive Environments

Effective interventions within the physical environment include:

- Provision of space and equipment for physical activity (e.g., fitness rooms, treadmills, elliptical machines, etc.)²⁰⁻²⁶
- Access to lockers, showers, bicycle racks^{22, 24, 25, 27}
- 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.)^{20, 22-24, 27}
- A work environment arranged to encourage movement throughout the day (e.g., shared printer a short distance away from desks)²²

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)^{20, 22, 24, 27}
- Professional guidance for ongoing support^{21, 25}
- Involvement of employees' families²²



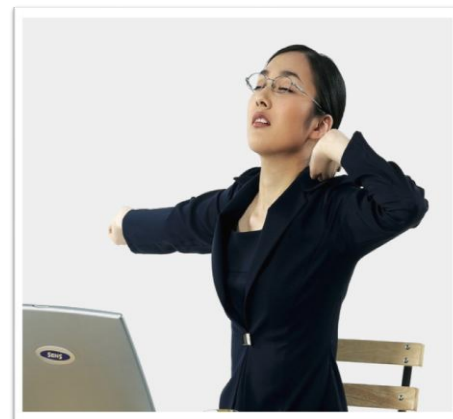
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According to the Canadian Fitness and Lifestyle Research Institute there are other things that can enhance a supportive workplace. These activities and events include:^{15, 18}

- 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

Creating Healthy Workplace Policy¹⁸

1. 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.
2. Adopt policies that focus specifically on physical activity. Consider the following:²⁸
 - o allow time specifically for physical activity
 - o formally recognizing participation in programs
 - o develop commuting policies
 - o recruit qualified personnel for the program
 - o involve all employees, including nonpermanent and shift workers
3. Ensure adequate training for all managers, supervisors and other key staff members.
4. Create sedentary work policies to shorten long stretches of sitting and other sedentary work.



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

Region of Waterloo Public Health Resources

Project Health has a number of resources available for planning, implementing and evaluating your workplace wellness activities. As well, we have a number of links to external resources that you may find helpful. Please see www.projecthealth.ca for further resources on this topics area.

Also, the Public Health Resource Centre has a number of displays, educational kits, DVDs, posters, books, and pamphlets relevant to workplace health. Search for resources using the online catalogue. Or simply contact Resource Centre staff with your topic and they will suggest resources for you. Note that resources may be booked in advance.

For more information, click [here](#) (link to:

<http://chd.region.waterloo.on.ca/web/health.nsf/DocID/1FB38293EBA4935785256B120060265E?OpenDocument>)

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Supporting Healthy Workplaces