



# Physical Activity

Domain Solutions



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# The Importance of Physical Activity

Making physical activity choices easy for your employees is an integral part of creating a comprehensive wellness program and an overall culture of health. Physical activity has many health benefits, including lowering the risk of<sup>(1)</sup>

- Cancer
- Early death
- Coronary heart disease
- Stroke
- High blood pressure
- Type 2 diabetes
- Falls
- Depression

In addition, physical activity has been shown to help reduce stress and anxiety and increase wellbeing and productivity. Physical activity may also be beneficial after a cancer diagnosis, helping to reduce the risk of recurrence, and improving quality of life.<sup>(2)</sup>

The *American Cancer Society* recommends that adults get at least 150 minutes of moderate intensity or 75 minutes of vigorous-intensity activity each week (or a combination of these), preferably spread throughout the week. Children and teens should get at least one hour of moderate or vigorous-intensity exercise each day, with vigorous activity on at least three days each week. Everyone should limit sedentary behavior such as sitting, lying down, watching TV, and other forms of screen-based entertainment.

If meeting these recommendations seems daunting to some of your employees who are not currently active at all, it's important to note that physical activity can be added gradually over time and they can work their way up to recommended activity levels. It is important to remember that "something is better than nothing." No matter what one's current level of activity, doing a little bit more each day can have many health benefits.



# Evidence-Based Practice 1: Guidelines Supporting Physical Activity During Work Hours

Making changes or improvements to your workplace so that employees feel supported to be physically active is an effective business strategy. The workplace is where people spend the majority of their waking hours and creating easy opportunities for physical activity has been proven effective at increasing exercise.<sup>(3)</sup> The easier it is to be physically active, the more likely a person is to exercise.

Developing and implementing guidelines that support activity in the workplace are key steps in creating a work environment where physical activity is encouraged and celebrated.

Employers should be aware that typical workplace wellness programs that require full-body movements may not be feasible for everyone. For example, individuals with balance or mobility impairments may not be able to participate fully in such programs. Accordingly, employers should try to design their programs to be inclusive of people with disabilities.

## Implementation Options

**Company guidelines.** When implementing a company guideline consider the following:

- Providing access to safe, clean stairwells and encouraging employees to take the stairs are an easy way to increase physical activity in the workplace. Point-of-decision prompts, including “take the stairs” signs are effective at increasing people’s choice to take the stairs instead of escalators or elevators.<sup>(4)</sup> Improvements to the stairwell appearance, such as new or restored carpeting, bold-colored walls, improved lighting, and artwork or motivational signs, can also increase stair usage.<sup>(5)</sup>
- Publishing company guidelines that reduce sedentary (sitting) time, including discouraging meetings during lunch, can encourage more physical activity. Additional options to increase activity in the workplace include encouraging walking meetings, breaks throughout the day for short bursts of activity, and building stretch breaks into the agendas of meetings that last more than one hour.



- Allowing employees to have flexible work schedules and take time for exercise if they choose (e.g., employees may use up to 90 minutes per week of work time to exercise) can support and encourage them to be active.
- Offering a standing workstation, treadmill desk, or a “walk-and-work” station to employees is a creative option for employees to increase their activity levels. <sup>(6)</sup>
- Create a company wellness committee to help set the direction of activities and represent the diversity of physical capabilities and disabilities among employees.
- Focus on inclusive health messaging at your workplace. (See the Inclusive Health Communication Scorecard resource below.)

## Tools and Resources\*

### *Tools and resources to assist employers*

- Worksite Physical Activity Guideline  
<https://www.acs4ccc.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/Physical-Activity-Worksite-Guideline-v20.pdf>
- A tip sheet on how to conduct walking meetings  
<http://www.gethealthyct.org/dev/wp-content/uploads/2016/05/Workplace-Wellness-Idea-21-Promote-Walking-Meetings-5-31-16V4.pdf>
- Get Moving Towards Inclusive Worksite Wellness  
<https://health.gov/news/blog-bayw/2016/06/get-moving-towards-inclusive-worksite-wellness>
- Inclusive Health Communication Scorecard (to promote inclusive communications)  
<https://www.nchpad.org/scoreCard>

\* Inclusion on this list does not imply endorsement by the American Cancer Society



## Evidence-Based Practice 2: Access to Physical Activity Options at or Near Worksite

Promoting and providing access to physical activity is not only attractive and beneficial to employees, but research also shows that healthy workforces benefit from reduced healthcare expenses. Physical activity helps to improve employees' productivity, reduce absenteeism, and increase morale.<sup>(7)(8)</sup> When possible, encourage employees to participate in physical activities during the workday, either at the worksite or in nearby fitness centers.

Remember that individuals with limited mobility may not be able to participate fully in typical workplace fitness programs. Employers should consider people with disabilities when designing workplace wellness programs.

### Implementation Options

**Take action to support physical activity at or near your worksite.** Supporting employee physical activity during the workday has many benefits. Here are some ideas to consider:

- Encourage employees to consult with their healthcare provider to help set goals and limitations before starting or changing an exercise program. This can help to avoid injuries and provide ongoing support and collaboration during regular wellness checkups.<sup>(9)</sup>
- Provide on-site physical activity equipment or a company gym to create easy opportunities to exercise. A dedicated space that enables employees to do their own stretching or exercise routine could be a good option. Access to stretch bands and exercise equipment or facilities in the workplace can help them commit to a long-term active lifestyle.
- Offer onsite physical activity classes such as basic stretching, yoga, or cardio exercises to make it more convenient for them to exercise.



- Offer discounted memberships to online fitness programs for remote workers or employees who travel to help motivate employees to exercise. This option is a way to offer fitness benefits to remote, off-site, and work-from-home workers or employees who are not interested in using an on-site fitness center.
- Map out walking paths in safe, attractive areas near your worksite to get employees up and moving in an inexpensive, easy, and fun way. It creates opportunities for employees to be social by engaging with colleagues and allows them to get fresh air and sunlight throughout the day. It's a good idea to consider providing complimentary sunscreen and promoting sun protection information for those using this outdoor option. See the guide to creating walking maps below.
- Map an indoor walking route through your worksite with distance markers to create a safe and easy way to encourage and support employees' physical activity. This is a reliable alternative to outdoor paths that workers can use to avoid cold weather, extreme summer heat, sun exposure, and rain. It also helps them to meet employees in other areas of the building and save time by remaining at their worksite.
- Designate an open space such as an atrium or meeting space that's not in use as a physical activity area for employees to do yoga, stretching, or other exercises.

## Tools and Resources\*

### *Tools and resources to assist employers*

- An easy-to-use indoor walking path guide that can be used to map out designated paths for walking breaks within the worksite and give ideas for exercises to do along the way.  
<https://www.acs4ccc.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/Indoor-Walking-Trail-v14.pdf>
- A guide with tips on how to establish a safe and accessible outdoor walking path  
<https://www.eatsmartmovemorenc.com/resource/walking-map-guide/>

### *Tools and resources for employees*

- American Cancer Society Fitness at Your Desk Infographic  
<https://www.acs4ccc.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/Fitness-at-Your-Desk-Infographic-v06.pdf>



- Deskercise – 20 Ways to Get Moving While You Work  
<https://www.nchpad.org/1061/5452/Deskercise~~20~Ways~to~Get~Moving~While~you~Work>
- Burn 100 Calories at Your Workplace (Seated Exercises)  
<https://www.nchpad.org/1628/6682/Burn~100~Calories~at~Your~Workplace>
- Introduction to Strengthening Exercises (Seated Exercises)  
<https://www.nchpad.org/374/2096/Strengthening~Exercises>

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## Evidence-Based Practice 3: Discounts at Commercial or Community Fitness Centers

Removing or reducing a cost barrier for employees to join a gym may improve physical activity levels for them and – if applicable – for their families. Employers can negotiate discounts directly with gyms or health clubs to develop their own discount fitness club network.

Another option is to offer discounted memberships to online fitness programs that can be done at home or on the road. This option is a way to offer fitness benefits to employees who are not interested in using a gym or fitness center.

### Implementation Options

**Discounted fitness club memberships.** Employers can offer their employees discounted memberships to online fitness programs that can be done at home or on the road. This option is one way to offer fitness benefits to those employees who are not interested in using a gym or fitness center.

Contact gyms or health clubs for information after building a list of your needs and preferences by considering the following ideas:

- Surveying your employees' preferences and asking them about their experiences as current or prior gym members can help you get a sense of their needs. Take note of needs for childcare services, preferred size, pools, structured classes, equipment options, and other assets.
- Ensuring employees can use discounted gym memberships is important. Consider if the gym has a trial option for a few visits to be sure it's a good fit. It's also important to consider fitness centers' hours of operation and your employees' ability to travel to them and the gym's proximity to other places of interest.



- Motivating your employees is critical. Some gyms offer services such as saunas, personal training, and massage packages that might make the discount appealing. When negotiating a deal, ask about these perks; they might help you to create committed gym members.

## Tools and Resources\*

### *Tools and resources for employers*

- Employee Gym Discounts: Going Beyond the Rate!  
<http://www.corporatewellnessmagazine.com/others/employee-gym-membership-discounts/>

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## Evidence-Based Practice 4: Support Active Transit

Supporting active transit is a resourceful way to encourage employees to be physically active. By using public transit (public buses, trains, streetcars, shuttles, etc.) or active transportation (walking, biking), workers have more opportunities to be active during their commutes. They can also help to reduce their carbon footprint and alleviate the stress that can come with daily car commutes.

### Implementation Options

**Support active transit.** Here are some ideas to support active transit options:

- Subsidizing the cost of using public transit may encourage employees to use this option. While the Tax Cuts and Jobs Act (the tax bill passed in late 2017) eliminates the business deduction for qualified mass transit and parking benefits, these benefits can still be offered to employees on a tax-free basis. Employees can pay their own mass transit or workplace parking costs using pretax income (up to \$260 per month), through an employer-sponsored salary-deduction program.<sup>(10)</sup> In addition, an employer can choose to offer reduced-price transit passes or reimburse employees for some or all of the cost of transit passes.<sup>(10)</sup>
- Offering a bicycle reimbursement program that covers employees' costs related to a bike purchase, maintenance, improvements, or storage, can increase options for employees to exercise. Bicycles can provide many health, environmental, and economic benefits to employees. In addition, employers who encourage commuting by bicycle experience a decrease in employee absenteeism.<sup>(11)</sup> Other ideas to encourage bicycling include the promotion of National Bike to Work Day and National Bike Month activities (both in May each year) and the application for a Bicycle Friendly Business designation through the League of American Bicyclists.
- Installing bike racks is a good way to demonstrate that your worksite is bike-friendly, and to ensure safety for bikers' property. If this isn't an option, permit the use of office space for bike storage.



- Offering a bike-sharing program during work hours is an easy way to encourage employees to exercise. They can use a bike to go to lunch, run errands, or take a quick ride during a break.
- Offering showers onsite for employees who bike to work or exercise during the day is another way to encourage employees to exercise. Even in predictably cooler cities, bike commuting can work up a sweat. While it may not be feasible for every employer to do, offering showers for employees to freshen up could help encourage biking to work.

## Tools and Resources\*

### *Tools and resources for employers*

- Transit and Parking Benefits: Design Programs to Increase Workers' Engagement  
<https://www.shrm.org/ResourcesAndTools/hr-topics/benefits/pages/transit-benefits-design.aspx>
- Becoming a Bicycle-Friendly Business  
<https://www.bikeleague.org/business>
- Information on National Bike Month, National Bike to Work Week, and National Bike to Work Day  
<https://bikeleague.org/bikemonth>

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## Evidence-Based Practice 5: Worksite Physical Activity Program

You can champion and support physical activity among your employees by hosting workplace physical activity events or challenges. You may want to encourage employees to participate in organized programs outside of work with friends or family.

Workplace fitness programs that require full-body mobility may not be accessible to employees that have balance or mobility limitations. Try to include people with disabilities when you design your workplace fitness programs.

### Implementation Options

**Organize or sponsor a worksite physical activity program.** Here are some ideas to consider for your program:

- Consider forming a volunteer-based wellness committee or identify wellness “champions” to engage departments, teams, and individual coworkers. The committee can help to plan and promote activities hosted by the workplace.
- Encouraging employees to set fitness goals can help them stay on track . Employees should feel comfortable participating in a fitness initiative irrespective of their fitness level, so be sure to choose or create a program that allows participants to set their own physical activity goals. Within the program, individual goal-setting allows everyone to feel successful. A wellness coach can help employees to set realistic activity goals.
- Participating in a group-based physical activity-related event or challenge can boost morale, improve teamwork, and strengthen communication among coworkers. When planning or selecting a physical activity program for your worksite, look for programs that include the social component of joining a team. For example, create a workplace social walking program for walks before, during, or after the workday, or look for programs that reward teams based on how many team members completed individual weekly goals.



- Incentivizing employee participation in fitness and wellness classes can help employees get started with a fitness program. As employee wellness programs have increased in popularity and prevalence, employers have looked for ways to boost participation to ensure as many people as possible are benefiting from the program. This has led to increased use of incentives to drive both program participation and results.

Participation-based incentives can include both monetary and non-monetary items (pens, T-shirts, gift cards, premium discounts, extra break time). They reward employees for choosing to participate in the program, regardless of the outcome.

Conversely, outcome-based incentives reward only the employees who achieve a specific goal like completing a multi-session yoga class or walking a certain number of steps in a week. Note that incentives have limited power. They might be able to encourage people to try a program or behavior but may not be effective at helping them to maintain the new behaviors over the long term.

## Tools and Resources\*

### *Tools and resources for employees*

- American Cancer Society *Fit2Be Cancer Free* Infographic  
<https://brandtoolkit.cancer.org>
- Deskercise – 20 Ways to Get Moving While You Work (PDF with 20 Exercises)  
<https://www.nchpad.org/1061/5452/Deskercise~~20~Ways~to~Get~Moving~While~you~Work>
- Burn 100 Calories at Your Workplace (Seated Exercises)  
<https://www.nchpad.org/1628/6682/Burn~100~Calories~at~Your~Workplace>
- Introduction to Strengthening Exercises (Seated Exercises)  
<https://www.nchpad.org/374/2096/Strengthening~Exercises>

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## Evidence-Based Practice 6: Communication with Employees

Communication strategies are critical for delivering information about expanded or improved physical activity options available in the workplace. The frequency of messaging, as well as communicating in new and different ways, contributes to your workplace culture of health and helps keep employees motivated. <sup>(12) (13)</sup>

### Implementation Options

**Communicate regularly with your employees about workplace support for physical activity.** Here are some communication ideas to consider:

- Providing regular messages – at least quarterly - reminds employees about the importance of physical activity and provides practical tips for incorporating more activity into their days.
- Providing creative learning opportunities related to physical activity is important, such as how to do exercises or stretches in your office using a desk, chair, or wall.
- Sharing frequent leadership messaging and demonstrating role-modeling that encourages physical activity during the workday is also important. For example, your CEO might lead everyone in a stretch break midway through a meeting. Executives could post their goals for a pedometer challenge (and current status) on the company intranet. Respected managers could encourage employees to take walking breaks and are seen taking walking breaks themselves.
- Posting resources for improving physical activity, information about accessing benefits, or company-sponsored health programs in high-traffic communication points like break rooms, meeting rooms, and intranet sites is important, too. If you have employees who speak languages other than English, make sure materials are available in those languages, too.



- Listening to diverse groups of employees, considering their feedback seriously, and incorporating their feedback into action steps is important to reach all employees with important health messages.

## Tools and Resources\*

### *Tools and resources for employers*

- The American Cancer Society offers a slide presentation that explains the importance of healthy nutrition and regular physical activity.

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