

AN ACTIVE WORKPLACE IS GOOD BUSINESS

Physical Activity in the Workplace

The World Health Organization estimates that investment in physical activity as part of a comprehensive workplace strategy can yield \$5.81 (US) for every \$1.00 invested.¹ The startling truth is that 85% of Canadian adults are not active enough for good health.²

It simply makes good business sense!

The economic burden of physical inactivity weighs heavily on Canadian businesses. In 2009, the estimated annual cost of physical inactivity was \$6.8 billion. Of this, \$2.4 billion was spent on direct health care costs, including hospitalizations, physician care and drug costs. A further \$4.7 billion of indirect costs was incurred in lost productivity due to premature death and disability.³ These indirect costs are absorbed by businesses through absenteeism, injuries, disability compensation, extended health benefits and life insurance costs.⁴

Supportive Workplaces are Critical for Active Living

The workplace setting plays a vital role in supporting physical activity among adults. Many Canadians spend over half of their waking hours at work. This, combined with family and community obligations, leaves little time for physical activity throughout the day. In Hastings and Prince Edward counties nearly 40% of adults aged 20-64 report being inactive.⁵

Everyone benefits from physical activity in the workplace. Employees gain the health benefits of leading an active lifestyle, and businesses reap the benefits of having a healthier, more productive workforce.



**Create an organizational culture
that values physical activity**

Help employees be active their way, every day

Everybody can do it!

The [Canadian Physical Activity Guidelines](#) recommend that adults build up at least 150 minutes of physical activity per week, in bouts of 10 minutes or more. Only two, 15 minute walking breaks in a workday can help employees meet these recommendations.

An Active Workplace has:

- ◆ Increased morale, more job satisfaction
- ◆ Lower health benefit costs
- ◆ Less staff turnover
- ◆ Decreased absenteeism
- ◆ Fewer work-related injuries

An Active Employee is:

- ◆ More productive and efficient
- ◆ Energetic and creative
- ◆ Better able to cope with the physical and mental demands of work
- ◆ At a lower risk of developing over 25 chronic diseases (e.g. heart disease and some cancers)

Lay the Foundation

An active workplace starts with a commitment from management and participation from employees. Everyone benefits when management and employees work together to identify issues, determine priorities and develop workplace programs and policies.

Create a Supportive Environment

A supportive environment makes it easier for employees to be active throughout the workday. Consider both the physical features that encourage physical activity and social aspects that make being active enjoyable.



Physical:

- ◆ Offer on-site fitness and skill development classes (yoga, safe cycling, learn to run, etc.)
- ◆ Distribute pedometers to track walking progress
- ◆ Ensure stairways are well lit and safe
- ◆ Subsidize access to fitness and sport centres
- ◆ Invest in standing workstations and fitness equipment at worksites
- ◆ Provide bicycle parking to support active commuting
- ◆ Make showers and lockers available
- ◆ Provide sports equipment (table tennis, foot balls, soccer balls, etc.) for use during breaks

Social:

- ◆ Allow flex time to enable active commuting or physical activity during the workday
- ◆ Encourage walking meetings and physical activity breaks during meetings
- ◆ Organize workplace sport teams
- ◆ Promote walking and running groups
- ◆ Participate in the [Commuter Challenge](#) to promote active transportation and reduce vehicle related emissions
- ◆ Host active family-oriented events such as ski trips, golf days, and low-cost active game days
- ◆ Represent your workplace at active charity fundraisers (e.g. MS Walk, Relay for Life)

Develop a Physical Activity Policy

Policies set the framework for creating a supportive environment. They are written statements, guidelines and procedures that ensure sustainable support for physical activity. Policies demonstrate formal commitment to physical activity, define goals and describe what will be done to create an active workplace. The [Public Health Agency of Canada](#) has best practice recommendations for workplace physical activity policies.

When developing a policy consider:

- ◆ The unique issues of your workplace environment. For instance, physical activity policies would be different for a factory setting compared to an office setting.
- ◆ Involving employees in the development of policy. This will secure participation and will ensure that employees benefit from policy initiatives.

Policy Example*

Purpose

Company X is committed to enhancing the well-being of employees and recognizes its role in employee health. As such, Company X will encourage, foster and support opportunities for staff to be less sedentary and more physically active.

Policy

Company X will strive to help employees move more and sit less at work (e.g. decrease sedentary behaviour, in particular prolonged sitting). In addition, this policy can assist employees to meet the recommendations outlined in the Canadian Physical Activity Guidelines.

Applicability

This policy applies to all employees, students and volunteers and all organizational events.

Procedure

Education and Awareness

Staff will be made aware of the negative health effects from sedentary behaviour (prolonged sitting) and how these negative effects can be countered while at work.

Staff will be made aware of the Canadian Physical Activity Guidelines and the health benefits from meeting the recommendations.

Staff will have the opportunity to learn more about how to lead an active lifestyle and that an active lifestyle is more than just an organized physical activity or going to the gym.

Supportive Environments

Work practices and the physical environment shall be modified where possible to enable staff to be active without compromising service delivery (e.g. adoption of sit-to-stand work stations, stand up meetings and/or standing breaks).

Company X, where appropriate, will provide human and fiscal resources to support wellness initiatives that address sedentary behaviour and physical activity for which staff participation is voluntary.

Management will actively work towards reducing sedentary behaviour via the promotion of moving more, role-modelling, and creating a positive social climate for more movement in the workplace.

Policy Development

Corporate policies and procedures should be reviewed and rewritten to support and encourage employees to become more active and less sedentary at work.

Managers will be notified of the new policy and educated about how to promote and support the policy within organizational teams and with community partners.

All staff will recognize their responsibility and opportunities to support this policy with respect to personal health practices and as contributors to a positive organizational culture.

Wellness Committee will provide operational support to implement this corporate policy.



*Adapted with permission from Hastings Prince Edward Public Health "Increasing Physical Activity and Reducing Sedentary Behaviour" Health and Safety Policy.

Helpful Resources

Hastings Prince Edward Public Health www.hpepublichealth.ca

- ◆ Displays
- ◆ Urban Pole Lending Program
- ◆ Toolkit (coming soon!)
- ◆ Pedometer Lending Program

Active Living Guide Visit www.hpepublichealth.ca and search for the “Active Living Guide”.

Canadian Physical Activity Guidelines www.csep.ca

Canadian Fitness & Lifestyle Research Institute www.cflri.ca

Commuter Challenge www.commuterchallenge.ca

Public Health Agency of Canada: Active Living at Work www.phac.gc.ca



References:

1. World Health Organization, World Economic Forum. (2008). Preventing Noncommunicable Diseases in the Workplace Through Diet and Physical Activity. WHO/World Economic Forum report of a joint event.
2. Colley, RC, et al. (2011). Physical activity of Canadian Adults: accelerometer results from the 2007 to 2009 Canadian Health Measures Survey. Health Reports. 22(1), 7-14.
3. Janssen, I. (2012). Health care costs of physical inactivity in Canadian adults. Journal of Applied Physiology, Nutrition and Metabolism, 37, 803-806.
4. Katzmarzyk, PT; Janssen, I. (2004). The economic costs associated with physical inactivity and obesity in Canada. An updated. Canadian Journal of Applied Physiology, 29, 90-115.
5. Statistics Canada. (2010). Table 105-0501 – Health indicator profile, annual estimates, by age group and sex, Canada, provinces, territories, health regions (2007 boundaries) and peer groups, occasional, CANSIM (database).
6. Canadian Society for Exercise Physiology. (2011). Canadian Physical Activity Guidelines: For Adults 18-64 Years.

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