

You are likely reading this document to begin preparations to write a physical activity workplace policy. And, perhaps you have leadership approval to do so.

In addition to leadership support, it is important to include others in your planning and roll-out of the policy. Employers who have previously enacted a policy indicate that the following can be beneficial partners: human resources, wellness committee members, leadership representatives, union representatives (gathering additional support), facilities and maintenance staff, and individuals who have an interest in graphics.

Then determine whether the planning and roll-out will be managed by the wellness team, an ad-hoc group or a combination of the two.

Creating a physical activity policy for the workplace

Introduction

Adequate physical activity* reduces risk for several diseases and conditions, including cardiovascular disease, stroke, high blood pressure, obesity, type 2 diabetes, osteoporosis, colon cancer, breast cancer, anxiety and depression.^{1, 2, 3}

Unfortunately, nearly one-third of adult Minnesotans do not get enough physical activity per week to meet CDC recommendations.⁴ As an employer, you have a unique opportunity to support increased physical activity levels among your employees by creating a worksite that makes it easy to build activity into the day, including places, indoor and outdoor, to be active.

When employers provide an environment, support, other opportunities or incentives for employees to be active, employees are more likely to use their breaks during the workday for physical activity.⁴

Preliminary research suggests that employer support may influence workers' activity during time away from work as well. This is good news for employers. According to several studies, physically active employees are, on average, both more productive and less costly (in terms of health care expenses) than inactive employees.^{5, 6, 7}

The best practice for employers who want to increase physical activity among employees includes the following components:

- **Availability and identification** of places for physical activity
- **Policies** that support physical activity
- **Programs** that promote more physical activity
- **Promotion** of opportunities for physical activity

PHYSICAL ACTIVITY GUIDELINES

ALL ADULTS SHOULD AVOID INACTIVITY. SOME PHYSICAL ACTIVITY IS BETTER THAN NONE, AND ADULTS WHO PARTICIPATE IN ANY AMOUNT OF PHYSICAL ACTIVITY GAIN SOME HEALTH BENEFITS.

FOR SUBSTANTIAL HEALTH BENEFITS, ADULTS SHOULD DO AT LEAST 150 MINUTES (2 HOURS AND 30 MINUTES) A WEEK OF MODERATE-INTENSITY, OR 75 MINUTES (1 HOUR AND 15 MINUTES) A WEEK OF VIGOROUS-INTENSITY AEROBIC PHYSICAL ACTIVITY, OR AN EQUIVALENT COMBINATION OF MODERATE- AND VIGOROUS INTENSITY AEROBIC ACTIVITY. AEROBIC ACTIVITY SHOULD BE PERFORMED IN EPISODES OF AT LEAST 10 MINUTES, AND PREFERABLY, IT SHOULD BE SPREAD THROUGHOUT THE WEEK.

Retrieved July 18, 2014 from:

<http://www.health.gov/paguidelines/guidelines/summary.aspx>

Healthy Worksites Checklist for Physical Activity

Review your completed Assessment for Physical Activity to determine areas of opportunities to support employees in being more active at the workplace.

In addition to the items in the Organizational Assessment, consider the following:

Action item	Answer	
1. Does your organization allow employees to use paid time (not lunch hours) to be active during the workday? Comments:	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No
2. Does your workplace have guidelines for supporting walking meetings? [This might include a framework for meetings, which meetings are optimal for walking (such as employee/manager updates).] Comments:	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No
3. Does your organization encourage movement throughout the day by a. Hosting standing/walking meetings? b. Offering employees the option of a sit-to-stand station? c. Offering a walking workstation?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> No
4. Does your organization reward employees who choose to walk or bike to work, or who park in remote lots? (e.g., provide those employees with their own private lockers, or provide a flexible start time in exchange for their choice to commute to work in an active way)	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No
5. Does your organization allow employees the opportunity to flex hours in order to make it easier to be active before, after, or during the workday (e.g., the option to start work an hour early in order to take a physical activity break during the day)? Comments:	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No
6. If your organization has a fitness center Is the room/fitness center available to employees 24 hours a day? Comments:	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No
7. Does your organization regularly investigate barriers to employees being active at work?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No
Notes:		

Availability & identification of places for physical activity

Once you have outlined the physical activity goals for your organization, be sure to list all of the places available for physical activity.

Promotion

How have you been doing so far? How often does your leadership promote places and programs in an effort for employees to be more physically active? Make a plan for better promotion of places for physical activity. What channels of communication can be used? Consider: memos, e-mails, posters, notices in employee publications, all-employee voicemails, messages on monitors, staff meetings, union meetings, presentations to managers and/or regular messages from your senior leaders.

Putting it all together

By looking at places and promotion – your organization can develop a list of strengths (already in place) and opportunities (your SMART goals). Use this information to write an organization-wide policy for physical activity.

Writing a policy for physical activity

The goal of a physical activity policy – whether developing a new policy or enhancing a current policy – is to make healthy choices the easy choices for your employees. Workers who receive this type of support are more likely to be physically active on their breaks, and employer support may influence workers' activity during time away from work as well.

Places Develop and identify places for employees to be physically active at or around the workplace, such as hallway walking, mapped outdoor walking routes, walking meetings, walking workstations, stairwells, fitness room/center, safe bike storage, bike sharing program and more.

Time for physical activity Allowing employees to use paid time to be physically active sends a strong message of support and encouragement. It also removes a major barrier – lack of time – to physical activity.

Dress code Review your organization's dress code. Does it allow employees to dress in a way that makes physical activity possible during the workday, that is, clothing and shoes that would allow for a 10- or 15-minute walk? If the dress code cannot provide for "walkable attire", encourage employees to keep walking shoes at their desks or workstations.

Active meetings Ask staff to hold standing or walking meetings. Good opportunities for walking meetings are meetings expected to last less than 30 minutes, have two or three attendees and involve discussion and/or creative thinking rather than presentations, handouts or note taking. Utilize indoor or outdoor walking routes. The best way to encourage walking meetings is modeling, especially by upper management. If one leader starts holding occasional walking meetings, the practice will spread.

Policy Promotion

At least once a quarter, communicate with your employees about workplace opportunities for physical activity – places to be active, policies that support activity and programs that encourage physical activity. Use a variety of communication channels: memos, e-mails, notices in employee publications, all-employee voicemails, messages on monitors, staff meetings, union meetings, presentations to managers and regular memos or e-mails from your senior leaders.

Set a positive tone from the very beginning. The purpose of the policy, and identification and availability of places is to support employees in being regularly active. Convey encouragement for physical activity. Be clear that you are creating improved *opportunities*, not a requirement, that employees be active. Reinforce the connection between employee health – including physical activity – and the success of your organization.

1 Kahn, Ramsey, Brownson, Heath et al. and the Task Force on Community Preventive Services. (2002) The effectiveness of interventions to increase physical activity. *AJPM*, 22, 73-107.

2 Mokdad, Marks, Stroup and Gerberding (2004), Actual causes of death in the U.S., 2000. *JAMA*, 291, 1238-1245.

3 Bulwer, B. (2004). Sedentary lifestyles, physical activity, and cardiovascular disease: From research to practice. *Critical Pathways in Cardiology*, 3,184.

4 CDC physical activity recommendation as measured in the Minnesota Physical Activity Survey 2007. *Recommendation: a minimum of 150 minutes of moderate activity per week OR a minimum of 75 minutes of vigorous activity per week OR a combination of the two where vigorous minutes count double toward the 150 minute requirement. Spreading activity over several days per week is encouraged but not required.

5 Foldes, Bland, An et al. Modifiable Health Risks and Short-Term Health Care Costs. Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Minnesota internal research, submitted for publication.

6 Anderson, 2000. *American Journal of Health Promotion*. 15:1.

7 Bunn, *JOEM*, 2006, 48:10.