

WellSpring

Promoting Physical Activity at Work

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What's in This Article for You?

This article includes three main topics:

- How promoting physical activity during the workday benefits both employees and employers.
- Effective ways to promote physical activity at work.
- Description of the Alberta Centre for Active Living's new *Physical Activity @ Work* website (www.centre4activeliving.ca/workplace) and how it can help you promote physical activity in your workplace.

Benefits of Promoting Physical Activity at Work

Being physically active is important for a healthy body and a healthy mind. In today's hectic society, it's often hard to find time to fit physical activity into your day. Since two-thirds of Canadians over the age 15 are employed, spending on average 60 per cent of their waking hours at work (Alberta Health & Wellness, 2004), the workplace is a great place to promote and participate in physical activity.

Promoting physical activity during the workday makes good business sense. The workplace is not only a good place to promote healthy habits, but the workplace itself has an impact on

people's health. Employers who find ways to help employees be active during their workday contribute to both health and job satisfaction.

The many benefits of promoting physical activity during the workday include reduced:

- absenteeism
- injuries
- turnover
- disability compensation
- health-care and life insurance costs

(Public Health Agency of Canada, 2004)



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Further benefits include improvements in:

- employee morale
- job satisfaction
- ability to cope with stress
- health and well-being
- productivity and effectiveness at work
- relations with co-workers
- enjoyment of work

(Public Health Agency of Canada, 2004)

Lack of time is the number one barrier to participating in physical activity (Canadian Health Network, 2005). If employees can't find time during their workday to participate in physical activity, they may not be active at all.

Effective Ways to Promote Physical Activity at Work

Installing an expensive fitness facility in the workplace is not the only way to promote physical activity at work. Simple changes at the workplace can also make it easier for people to be active.

For example, flex time allows employees to bicycle to work or play a game of squash at lunch. Allowing employees to make up missed time at the end of the day lets them be physically active when it best suits them.

Installing bicycle racks and showers at the workplace can encourage staff to cycle to work. Simply posting a sign-up board for a lunchtime walking group will promote physical activity and social relationships among employees. Small changes like these at the workplace can make a big difference in people's lives.

The Physical Activity @ Work Website (www.centre4activeliving.ca/workplace)

An Effective and Evidence-Based Approach

Focusing on environmental changes is an effective way to promote physical activity (Fielding, Pelletier, & Stokols, 1996; Heaney & Goldenhar, 1996).

The Alberta Centre for Active Living's *Physical Activity @ Work* website takes this broad approach to physical activity promotion by including the



“bigger picture” of the workplace culture and environment.

The website helps you promote activity using different ways, or “levels” (taking what's called an ecological approach). Below is a brief description of the five levels highlighted in *Physical Activity @ Work*. Targeting physical activity through all of these levels increases your chance of successfully promoting activity in the workplace.

- **Individual Level:** Ways to influence employees' physical activity attitudes, knowledge and skills. Employees need to know why physical activity is important and how much is required. They need the skills to get and stay active, including the ability to set realistic goals and overcome barriers such as a lack of time and energy.
- **Social Level:** Enhancing social relationships (existing and new, both inside and outside the workplace). Examples include making physical activity during the workday the “norm,” organizing friendly challenges and encouraging family members to participate.
- **Organizational Level:** How the workplace is organized, how the company shows commitment to physical activity and what company resources (time and money) go toward promoting physical activity.

- **Community Level:** How the workplace interacts with community organizations that encourage physical activity, such as government agencies. Your organization may also work with professionals who come into the workplace to give a “lunch and learn” session, with city planners to develop walking/biking paths or with other organizations in your office building (e.g., sharing physical activity space).
- **Policy Level:** Workplace policies (e.g., flex time to allow active commuting or casual Fridays) can make it easier for employees to be physically active. Sometimes, policies that support physical activity are all that’s needed to encourage employees to be more active.

Much of the information in the *Physical Activity @ Work* website is based on the research from the centre’s *Workplace Physical Activity Framework* (Alberta Centre for Active Living, 2003).

Physical Activity @ Work Website Features

- **Benefits of Physical Activity @ Work:** A section on the benefits of physical activity in general and the bottom-line benefits of promoting physical activity during the workday.
- **Keys to Success:** The changes in the workplace that make a real difference in people’s lives. Keys to Success focuses on the importance of considering the five “levels” discussed above when promoting physical activity during the workday.
- **Steps:** A step-by-step planning guide that helps you successfully promote physical activity during the workday.
- **Practical Ideas:** Pages of practical ideas give employees and employers many new ways to encourage physical activity.

- **Success Stories:** These stories track the experiences of a variety of Alberta companies who are “walking the talk” in their workplaces.
- **Activity Tracker:** Track your daily physical activity and set weekly goals.
- **Yoga and Stretching Videos:** Exercise right at your desk with the *Yoga @ Your Desk* and *Stretch @ Your Desk* videos. Both videos will be available in English and French.
- **Index:** An Index makes it easy to find the information you need to encourage physical activity at work.

References

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Mission Statement of the Alberta Centre for Active Living

Working with practitioners, organizations, and communities to improve the health and quality of life of Albertans through physical activity.

News from the Alberta Centre for Active Living

Physical Activity @ Work website launch
www.centre4activeliving.ca/workplace

The centre has launched its new website designed to help employers, employees, and human resource and wellness coordinators promote physical activity before, during and after the workday.

Centre E-Bulletin
www.centre4activeliving.ca/news/bulletin.html

Read the latest E-Bulletin to find out more about the centre's plans for the next few months

Centre's Physical Activity Backgrounder for Decision-Makers
www.centre4activeliving.ca/publications/factsheets.html

An information sheet for decision-makers that details the reasons to promote physical activity policies. The handout also lists Canadian and Albertan rates of physical inactivity and some of the major costs of physical inactivity.

Canadian Health Network (CHN): Active Living section
www.canadian-health-network.ca

We are looking for credible resources from not-for-profit sources on the following topics:

- Active living and Aboriginal peoples living on reserves or in urban areas. (We're also interested in information on active living in relation to Aboriginal people with arthritis.)
- French resources on Active living in rural, remote or northern communities (especially B.C., Nova Scotia, P.E.I.).
- Active living and creatine.
- Active living and hernias.

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IF YOU HAVE ANY SUGGESTIONS OR QUESTIONS, WE'D LIKE TO HEAR FROM YOU.

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Alberta
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Research and education for the promotion of physical activity