



Increasing Physical Activity and Decreasing Sedentary Behaviour in the Workplace

Summary 3: Organizational Culture and Norms

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REPORTS IN THIS SERIES:

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ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURE AND NORMS

The articles from the systematic review (refer to the Executive Summary) were summarized into four distinct, yet interrelated, groups based on common themes. The third of four summaries explores Organizational Culture and Norms.

Employees spend the majority of their day at work. Therefore, it is extremely important that workplaces create an office environment that supports increasing physical activity and reducing sedentary behaviour. Some examples include:

- Walking breaks instead of coffee breaks.
- Hourly computer prompts reminding employees to stand up and move.
- Formalizing workplace physical activity and sedentary behaviour policies.
- Establishing a lunch time walking group with coworkers.

Consciously adapting and challenging the traditional workplace culture and norm to be one that focuses on participation in daily physical activity and disruption of long bouts of sitting time supports healthier employees, enhances morale, and improves workplace productivity.

Periodic physically active work breaks have been shown to reduce employee physical discomfort and health risks associated with prolonged sitting.

| Effectiveness and Quality of the Organizational Culture and Norm Studies | | |
|--|---|---------------------------------------|
| Outcome | Effectiveness of Intervention | Quality of Studies |
| Increased Physical Activity | 80% of the studies reported an increase in physical activity (4/5 studies found significance) | ★☆☆ (Mean: 0.80; Range: -4 to 6)* |
| Decreased Sedentary Behaviour | 67% of the studies reported a decrease in sedentary behaviour (2/3 studies found significance) | ★★★☆☆ (Mean: 3.67; Range: 1 to 6)* |

*Quality of studies: scores and associated stars are based on the average risk of bias assessment for the studies. The risk of bias is considered high in studies that do not randomly assign participants to the intervention, do not blind participants and personnel to the intervention, have incomplete data, have selective reporting, or have other potential threats to the validity of the findings. Studies with a lower risk of bias are considered of higher quality. Studies conducted in a naturalistic setting, such as workplaces, generally have a higher degree of bias.

- ★☆☆ : Poor Quality Studies (scored -7 to 0);
- ★★☆☆ : Moderate Quality Studies (scored 1 to 4);
- ★★★☆☆ : High Quality Studies (scored 5 to 7).

DESCRIPTION OF ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURE AND NORMS

Recommendations from the Literature

Changing the workplace culture and norm to include daily physical activity is a **smart business move!** Health-specific workplace policies can lay the groundwork to improve the workplace environment.

Assess

- 1) Conduct a **workplace physical activity assessment** to evaluate employee interests, employee level of readiness, potential barriers, workplace environment, and available resources.

Prepare

- 2) **Research and model** existing workplace physical activity policies.
- 3) Develop **Workplace Physical Activity Policies**, such as:
 - Provide flexible work hours for employees (e.g., coming into work earlier or later to foster engaging in physical activity).
 - Introduce corporate policies that combat prolonged sitting (e.g., standing meetings, active breaks instead of coffee breaks, walking lunch groups, standing desk stretches).
- 4) **Promote and educate** employees about the new physical activity policy and the benefits of cultivating a workplace that supports employee wellness. This will enhance awareness and understanding. Ideas include:
 - Host a **short seminar** educating employees and management about the benefits of physical activity at work.
 - Place educational **physical activity infographics** in workplace common areas.

Implement

- 5) **Implement policies** when:
 - Potential barriers have been addressed.
 - Goals are clearly stated.
 - Implementation timeframes are outlined.
 - There is buy-in from individuals influenced by the new policies.
- 6) **Evaluate the policy** to monitor its effectiveness.

Evaluate and Reinforce

- 7) **Review the policy** annually and adapt it to the changing organizational needs.
- 8) **Reinforce** the policy by showing employees organizational level commitment towards positive health changes within the workplace. Make physical activity an easy choice at work. Such activities include:
 - Offer secure bicycle storage and showers for employees who actively commute.
 - Make stairwells more appealing with paint, artwork and motivational signage.
 - Map out various walk/bike routes around the workplace and organize lunchtime walking, running, bicycling, or yoga groups.
 - Make standing or pacing (versus sitting) at long meetings an acceptable option.
 - Encourage workers to be active at their workstations by stretching or standing while on the phone.

Remember: Changing the workplace culture and norm to innately support daily physical activity will require time, patience and continuous effort from all individuals within the workplace.

TOOLS FOR IMPLEMENTING ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURE AND NORMS INTERVENTIONS

IMPLEMENTATION AND POLICY DEVELOPMENT GUIDES

- 1) [Investing in Physical Activity Through the Workplace: A Toolkit for Policy Development](#): This toolkit outlines how to establish and cultivate a workplace that supports physically active employees through development, implementation and promotion of a physical activity policy.
- 2) [Alberta Centre for Active Living - Physical Activity@Work](#): This user-friendly website helps employers, employees, workplace wellness coordinators and human resources advisors encourage physical activity in the workplace.
- 3) [Step By Step: A Workplace Walking Resource](#): This toolkit was designed to assist organizations in the implementation of walking programs.
- 4) [Feet First Guide to Walking Meetings](#): This online resource educates individuals about the benefits of walking meetings and how to implement them.
- 5) [Promoting Physical Activity at Work: A Toolkit for Workplaces](#): This collection of information, resources, activities and tools from a variety of organizations can help get employees active while at work.

ACTIVE BREAKS

Computer Prompt Software: Computer software prompting people to stand up and move around hourly can be installed on each employee's computer as a reminder to disrupt sitting time.

- [TimeLeft Software](#): a free downloadable and customizable computer application that counts down and provides a pop-up reminder message for scheduled employee work breaks.
 - **Activity Frequency:** 5 minutes of active behaviour every hour.
 - **Recommendation:** Computer prompts should provide employees with a physical activity suggestion, such as "Stand up and take 100 steps" or "Complete a series of standing stretches".

Videos: Online videos are an inexpensive resource that demonstrate quick and easy forms of physical activity that employees can follow at their convenience in their work space. Here are some useful workplace videos:

- [Yoga at Your Desk](#)
- [Stretching at Your Desk](#)
- [Standing Stretches](#)
- [Exercising Your Hands and Wrists](#)

Standing Meeting Table: Purchase an inexpensive table from IKEA with adjustable legs and set it to an appropriate height for standing meetings.

UWALK.ca: This free online resource allows individuals to track their physical activity, monitor their progress and compete in individual or group challenges with friends, family or coworkers.

PHYSICAL ACTIVITY AND SEDENTARY BEHAVIOUR EDUCATION

These educational documents can be printed and placed in common areas for all to access:

- [8-Office Stretches](#): These slides provide detailed instructions on simple stretches that can be completed at a workplace.
- [Canadian Physical Activity and Sedentary Behaviour Guidelines](#): These single-paged guidelines provide recommendations on the amount and type of physical activity needed to experience positive changes to our health.
- [Bottom-Line Benefits of Physical Activity at Work](#): This webpage outlines detailed information about the health and workplace benefits associated with physical activity at work.

BACKGROUND

Characteristics of Studies Included in the Review

POPULATION

Healthy adults, 18 years of age or older, working in a full-time or part-time capacity:

Average # of participants = 201

Range in # of study participants: 14 to 664



INTERVENTIONS

Average duration = 11.7 weeks

Range in duration =
1 week to 9 months



COMPARISONS

Measured in a pre-test/
post-test format, with or
without a control group.



OUTCOMES

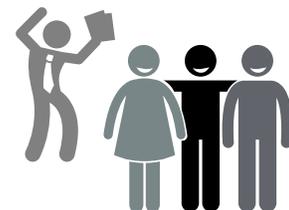
Primary Outcomes

- **For Physical Activity**, the greatest impact was observed in daily steps and daily MET¹ minutes of physical activity.
- **For Sedentary Behaviour**, the time employees spent in prolonged (30 minutes) uninterrupted sitting periods was most impacted when education was provided in conjunction with changes to cultures and norms.



Secondary Outcomes

- Positive influences on management support and employee involvement were observed.
- A reduction in levels of depression among employees was reported.



The following studies with organizational culture and norms interventions were included in the systematic review:

Dishman, DeJoy, Wilson, & Vandenberg (2009); Evans, Fawole, Sheriff, Dall, Grant, & Ryan (2012); Flannery, Resnick, Galik, Lipscomb, Mcphaul, & Shaughnessy (2012); Gazmararian, Elon, Newsome, Schild, & Jacobson (2013); Gilson, Puig-Ribera, McKenna, Brown, Burton, & Cooke (2009); Swartz, Rote, Welch, Maeda, Hart, Cho, & Strath (2014).

¹MET = Metabolic Equivalent of Task, or simply metabolic equivalent

RESOURCES

| | |
|--|--|
| 8-Office Stretches | www.mayoclinic.org/healthy-lifestyle/adult-health/multimedia/stretching/sls-20076525 |
| Alberta Centre for Active Living - Workplace Portal | www.ualberta.ca/~active/workplace/ |
| Bottom-Line Benefits of Physical Activity @ Work | www.ualberta.ca/~active/workplace/beforestart/benefits-bottom-line.html |
| Canadian Physical Activity and Sedentary Behaviour Guidelines | www.csep.ca/english/view.asp?x=804 |
| Exercising Your Hands and Wrists (Video) | www.youtube.com/watch?v=MNtHfPDxB20 |
| Feet First Guide to Walking Meetings | www.feetfirst.org/walk-and-maps/walking-meeting |
| Investing in Physical Activity Through the workplace: A Toolkit for Policy Development | http://bit.ly/1H9t40p |
| Promoting Physical Activity at Work: A Toolkit for Workplaces | http://bit.ly/1Fx3qeE |
| Standing Meeting Table | www.ikea.com/ca/en/ |
| Standing Stretches (Video) | www.mayoclinic.org/healthy-living/adult-health/multimedia/lower-back-stretches/vid-20084701 |
| Step By Step: A Workplace Walking Resource | www.bcrpa.bc.ca/media/61496/step-by-step-resources.pdf |
| Stretching at Your Desk (Video) | www.youtube.com/watch?v=F2EzRJayAYE |
| TimeLeft Software | www.nestersoft.com/timeleft/ |
| UWALK.ca | uwalk.ca/ |
| Yoga at Your Desk (Video) | www.youtube.com/watch?v=tAUf7aajBWE |

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