

Lifestyle Tips



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Workplace Physical Activity. Got 10 minutes?

Feel like you never have time for physical activity? You're not alone - one of the most often cited reasons for not getting enough exercise is lack of time. Modern life is unrelentingly busy and studies of Canadian social trends show that the time crunch is, in fact, getting worse. More of us are spending increasingly longer hours on the job, and more time commuting to and from work.

If adults are spending more time at work, then one logical solution to the inactivity crisis is to fit short bouts of physical activity into our daily workplace routine. But can that really work?

Research on this very topic is positive – one study that reviews the results of many “at work” physical activity interventions indicates that workplace programs that integrate 10 -15 minute bouts of physical activity into the organizational routine can deliver consistent health benefits.¹ In particular, most workplace programs contribute to an increase in physical activity levels. Other health improvements observed in the study include the sorts of things that would make anyone’s job easier; better cognitive performance, increased work productivity, reduced stress, improved mood, and reduced risk indicators for future disease, such as high blood pressure.



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Building physical activity into a workplace routine can be supported by changes in behaviour at both the organizational and the personal level. A recent workplace survey suggests that a majority of us sneak in time during the day to take care of personal things like emails and phone calls.² If that's the case, then there really is time for a short physical activity break.

Here are some ideas on how to boost physical activity levels at work and fit in short bouts of physical activity into your day.

Make the case for active living in your workplace. Being an advocate for a workplace physical activity program can help you be more active, and it may win you points with both your co-workers and your boss. Tap into resources such as the Public Health Agency of Canada's presentation, *The Business Case for Active Living at Work*, that can be used to help persuade senior management create an environment at work where fitting physical activity into your day is accepted and encouraged.

Walk while you talk. Walking meetings, where the discussion happens on the move,

and not in the boardroom, are a great way to get both the body and mind in gear. Walking meetings are great for one-on-one or small group update meetings where good ideas and conversation flow. Need to take notes? Most smartphones have voice-note applications that can turn the talk into text.

Swap-up your email or water cooler breaks. If part of your routine is a mid-morning coffee break where you discuss what you saw on TV the night before, why not shake things up? Work breaks are great for increasing productivity and starting in on the next task – and a physical activity break is even better still. A 10 minute walk, down the street, up and down the office stairs, or even through the building where you work, contributes to the 150 minutes of physical activity that you need every week. Just make sure that your heart rate is elevated to make it count!

Get moving to get errands done. Most people have personal “jobs” that never seem to get done. Things like getting to the post office, the dry cleaner or even picking up a birthday gift always seem to be on the perpetual “to do” list. Keep a running list

of errands that can be knocked-off near your workplace, and then make sure that you walk, bike or run while you get them done over the lunch-hour.

Turn lunchtime into a regular group activity. Co-workers and colleagues can become a motivational force to get each other moving. Start a lunchtime activity; yoga, a walking club, pick-up softball, or going to a local gym class en masse can be a great way to book physical activity into your day. By making a commitment to others, you'll be more likely to stick to your physical activity plan.

When we build physical activity into our daily routine, we have a much better chance of turning it into a habit that sticks. If every 10 minute bout of physical activity counts towards achieving health benefits, fitting a regular fitness break into our work day is something that every one of us can try to make a move towards.

¹ Barr-Anderson et al. (2011). Integration of short bouts of physical activity into organizational routine a systematic review of the literature. *Am J Prev Med*, 2011 Jan; 40(1): 76-93.

² Angus Reid Public Opinion Daily National Omnibus Survey, unpublished data. March 16th – 19th, 2012.