



GUIDE TO CREATING A PHYSICALLY ACTIVE WORKSITE

Along with the individualized feedback from your reports, the aim of this narrative is to guide you through each key component of this wellness topic, in a readable format, to help you increase access to physical activity at your organization and get to an ‘A’ on the assessment. **All of the associated tools and resources can be found by using the search feature for the Physical Activity toolbox.**

Here are four strategic methods to become a physically active worksite:

- 1. Establishing policies that safely promote physical activity**
Paid time to exercise can motivate your employees to improve their health, boost morale and increase overall productivity.
- 2. Creating an environment conducive to physical activity**
Make it easy to be active! Be sure to consider all employees, including shift workers and those with disabilities.
- 3. Educating employees about physical activity benefits**
Educate and communicate not only about the benefits of physical activity, but also the benefits that your organization offers *for* participating in physical activity.
- 4. Developing effective incentives and benefit programs that reward physically active employees**
Research shows that providing incentives increases participation in wellness programs, including those related to physical activity. Be sure to know your employee population and which incentives would be right for them.

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GET STARTED

*To search for essential resources and tools for this wellness topic, select **Getting Started** from the Key Component drop-down options in the Physical Activity toolbox search and click Search*

Before you can create a worksite that is fully supportive of employee physical activity, here are some things you may want to consider before getting started:

➤ **Get buy-in from your President/CEO/Leadership**

When establishing wellness and healthy lifestyle policies, you'll need some high-level support. Programs without executive support have a hard time sustaining momentum and participation, and often fail. And you don't want to risk getting your wellness program cancelled because you forgot to ask the boss. Involving executives early and getting them to publicly make wellness a priority will help staff and employees see the policy as a part of the organization's permanent culture, not just a temporary campaign or promotion.

➤ **Organize your wellness committee**

Now that you've been given the green light to get well at work, it's time to get your wellness team together. Don't worry if you're the only person who's on your committee (actually, think how much easier it will be to schedule meetings). But if you can secure some help, you'll get input (and buy-in) from a team that shares responsibilities and supports one another. This will greatly improve the chances that your program will succeed and keep employees healthy and productive.

➤ **Use WorkHealthy America reports to improve**

Download your Recommendations report and Action Plan and we'll tell you how to get started, identify specific goals and areas for improvement and help you meet or exceed all principles or key components of a physically active worksite.

➤ **Get ready to monitor and evaluate the success of your physically active worksite**

For any program to be successful, you'll need to be ready evaluate its effectiveness and impact, ideally before you implement the program or policy. By simply monitoring employee attitudes, for example, you will be able to identify the areas that are most popular and understand where tweaks to the program may need to be made. Consider sending a wellness survey to receive employee feedback as well and consider tracking program participation and even behavior change if possible.



KEY COMPONENT 1: POLICY

*To search for essential resources and tools for this wellness topic, select **Policy** from the Key Component drop-down options in the Physical Activity toolbox search and click Search*

Adopt and Implement Leadership and Policy Infrastructure Supportive of Physical Activity

Essential elements to addressing this key component:

1. Provide employees with **paid time to exercise** during each workday
2. Offer employees **flexible work hours** to schedule physical activity according to their preferences
3. Have employees sign **waivers of liability/assumption of risk** forms before participating in physical activity during work hours
4. Regularly **evaluate** the effectiveness of your physical activity policies and programs
5. Actively **communicate** information about physical activity policies and programs to employees



At the policy level, many approaches can be taken to encourage employees to be more physical activity. For example, it has been shown that providing paid time to exercise during work hours may increase levels of physical activity. Flextime scheduling can also be introduced to allow employees to incorporate physical activity into their day at a time that works best for them. Holding 'healthy meetings' and scheduling activity breaks into the workday are other great options.

It is important that employees are aware of policies and programs put in place to promote physical activity. This issue can be addressed at new employee orientation, and can also be included in the employee policy manual. You can also communicate these benefits by highlighting them in educational materials (i.e., newsletters, emails, posters). Employees must be informed about the risks associated with being physically active, and you will want to have liability waivers signed before implementing your physical activity policies.

Once policies and programs are put in place and efforts are made to notify staff of their contents, regular evaluations must be conducted to determine their effectiveness. Effectiveness may be based on improvements in a number of outcome variables, such as an increased number of employees acquiring 30 minutes of physical activity a day or decreased use of sick time.



KEY COMPONENT 2: ACCESS/ENVIRONMENT

*To search for essential resources and tools for this wellness topic, select **Access/Environment** from the Key Component drop-down options in the Physical Activity toolbox search and click Search*

Create an Environment Conducive to Physical Activity

Essential elements to addressing this key component:

1. Provide **access** to physical activity opportunities **during work hours**
2. Provide **access** to physical activity facilities **outside of work hours**
3. Carry out **regular safety inspections** of onsite exercise facilities and/or equipment
4. Encourage **alternative commuting** to work
5. Provide accommodations for **employees with special needs**



Of course, creating physical activity friendly policies will do little to change behavior if employees have limited access to the space or facilities they need to be active. Providing access to onsite fitness facilities is ideal (ie., cardiovascular equipment, free weights), but there are many other low cost options that your company can pursue. For example, attractive stairwells accompanied by point-of-decision-prompts can encourage employees to be more active.

To help employees reach 10,000 steps a day, you can find creative ways to utilize both indoor and outdoor walkways. Or perhaps consider getting your staff excited about exercise by organizing a corporate challenge, an intercompany competition, holding a health fair, or participating in a charity event as a group.

You can encourage active commuting by providing bike racks, as well as shower facilities and places to change clothes and store belongings. Incorporating physical activity into meetings and setting up lunchtime activity groups can help create a worksite climate that fosters physical activity during the workday. Be sure to also make your indoor and outdoor facilities available for use before and after work hours to incorporate all employee preferences.

Lastly, in making your worksite more exercise-friendly, it is important that regular safety inspections are performed and that employees with special needs are always accommodated.



KEY COMPONENT 3: EDUCATION

*To search for essential resources and tools for this wellness topic, select **Education** from the Key Component drop-down options in the Physical Activity toolbox search and click Search*

Educate Staff about Available Physical Activity Options

Essential elements for addressing this key component:

1. Educate employees about the **importance of physical activity**
2. Use **motivational signs** or **point-of-decision prompts** to encourage people to get more physical activity
3. Actively **communicate** with employees about **opportunities** for physical activity, as well as your **policies** and **benefits** that support physical activity

The benefits of leading an active lifestyle are seemingly endless. Adults who get the recommended amount of daily activity reduce their risk of chronic diseases, including heart disease, many forms of cancer, obesity and type II diabetes. In addition to preventing or delaying the onset of these debilitating, costly conditions, being physically active has many immediate benefits that can improve employee productivity and morale. Those who exercise regularly are likely to have more energy, be more alert and focused, and be less stressed!

The first step in motivating employees to be more physically active is to help them recognize the benefits associated with making this lifestyle change. Many strategies have been shown to increase employee awareness of the importance of leading an active lifestyle. Some evidence-based examples include emails, newsletters, motivational posters and brochures, and point-of-decision prompts.

After establishing the importance of daily physical activity, it is important that you continue to educate employees and visitors, and also begin to advertise opportunities for physical activity, such as active commuting, onsite activity classes, or local or national events. Also, be sure to make employees aware of any health insurance or equivalent employee benefits available to those that are physically active.



FitArlington - Take the Stairs Campaign



KEY COMPONENT 4: BENEFITS & INCENTIVES

*To search for essential resources and tools for this wellness topic, select **Benefits & Incentives** from the Key Component drop-down options in the Physical Activity toolbox search and click Search*

Use Benefit Design and Incentives to Encourage Behavior Change

Essential elements for addressing this key component:

1. **Provide incentives** and/or disincentives to employees for participating in physical activity
2. Offer a **discount** for employees to join a local or onsite **exercise facility**
3. Offer **health insurance benefits or equivalent employee benefits** that support physical activity
4. **Communicate and promote benefits** and incentives through your wellness program

Providing preventive health insurance or equivalent employee benefits can motivate employees to engage in more physical activity. Employers are always encouraged to provide a discounted membership rate at an onsite or local fitness facility (through your insurance provider or through a direct relationship with the external facility). For better compliance, consider extending this benefit to family members and providing onsite child care.

When establishing an incentive/benefits campaign to promote physical activity, it is important to get initial feedback from your employees regarding what type of incentives are most appealing (i.e., cash bonuses, lower health insurance premiums, earned gifts for participation).

Be sure to evaluate your incentive-based programs to ensure that the rewards you offer continue to be desirable and motivating, and that they are awarded at times that best keep employees engaged (ie. at completion of a program, when an outcome goal is achieved). Be sure to follow all legal guidelines when incentivizing employees to participate in wellness programs or achieve certain health standards. Contact your legal representative for more information on HIPAA, GINA, ADA and any other wellness program regulations.

Again, communication is key! Make sure that employees are aware of any benefits offered to them through their health insurance provider or through your company. This issue can be addressed at new employee orientation, and can also be included in the employee policy manual, as well as in emails, newsletters, or posters.