

Health Promotion / Wellness / Psychosocial

Active Living At Work

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What is active living?

Active living is an approach to life that values and includes physical activity in everyday living. The goal is to look for ways to be active at work, school, at home, and during leisure time.

Active living is not the same as an exercise program. Active living means making physical activity part of everyday life, whether you are taking the stairs instead of the elevator, participating in a standing or walking meeting, biking to work, doing yoga at lunch, gardening, taking the kids or dog to the park, walking to the other building at your facility, or swimming laps in the pool.

How much activity is enough?

It is easier than you think to be “physically active”. The Public Health Agency of Canada recommends that we be active at least 2.5 hours (150 minutes) a week to achieve the health benefits. The goal is to complete moderate to vigorous aerobic activity. This goal can be achieved throughout the day by accumulating 10-minute or more periods of activity. Physical activity should be a mixture of endurance, flexibility and strength activities. This mixture helps to strengthen the heart and lungs, keep joints flexible and mobile, and maintain strong bones. Target your muscles and bones at least two days per week.

The following chart is an example of what moderate to vigorous aerobic activity “looks like”:

Time Needed Depends on Effort				
Very light Effort	Light Effort	Moderate Effort	Vigorous Effort	Maximum Effort
Strolling Dusting	Light walking Volleyball Easy gardening Stretching	Brisk walking Skating Biking Raking leaves Swimming Dancing Water aerobics	Aerobics Cross-country skiing Jogging Hockey Basketball Fast swimming Fast dancing	Sprinting Racing
How should I feel while exercising? How warm am I? What is my breathing like?				
No change from when you are resting	Starting to feel warm	Warmer	Quite warm	Very hot/ perspiring heavily
Normal breathing	Slight increase in breathing rate	Greater increase in breathing rate	More out of breath	Completely out of breath

What are examples of some types of activities?

It is important to have a mixture of activities in your routine.

Endurance (aerobic) exercise helps improve the body's ability to use oxygen.

- Walking quickly
- Skating
- Bike riding
- Golfing (without a cart)
- Cycling
- Dancing

Flexibility routines help to maintain the body's ability to bend and stretch easily.

- Gardening or yardwork
- Yoga
- Tai chi

- Stretches at your workstation

Strength training helps strengthen muscles as well as improve balance and posture.

- Climbing stairs
- Lifting and carrying toolboxes (or young children)
- Lifting weights
- Resistance training
- Gardening involving digging or shovelling

Exercises that help strengthen your bones include:

- Running
- Walking
- Yoga
- Jumping rope

How do I find time to be active at work?

Many times people feel they don't have time to 'add' activity into their day. The workplace can help. A workplace can encourage workers to take on various activities at all levels, regardless of age and ability. For most people, they just need help to get started. "Balance" needs to come from the individual wanting to start or continue with an activity program and having encouragement from the workplace in order to meet these objectives. Whether you work in a small or large company, there are many areas and strategies that can increase participation in fitness and active living programs.

Some strategies are:

- Develop a physical fitness policy for the workplace.
- Ask staff what types of programs they are interested in.
- Encourage everyone to participate, and support their various ability levels.
- Have flexible working hours. Allowing people to arrive at work a little later, or leave a little earlier can help them add activity to their day.
- Job sharing, telecommuting, and on-site daycare will also provide some flexibility to schedules.
- Allow individuals to take an extra half hour twice a week at lunch to walk, swim, attend fitness class, etc.

- Encourage people to walk to a co-worker's office or workstation rather than using the telephone or e-mail.
 - Allow for and encourage [stretch breaks](#) while at the workstation.
 - Allow for walking meetings, either inside or outside.
 - Provide workstations or desks that allow for [both sitting and standing](#).
 - Map a 10-minute walking route inside or outside your workplace. Encourage staff to take a mid-morning or afternoon “active” break.
 - Start each workday or shift with a pre-shift stretch program.
 - Provide bike racks (in a secure location).
 - Offer on-site change rooms, fitness facilities, or negotiate access to various health clubs in the area.
 - Offer a clean room or space where activity can take place, such as a conference room. Allow storage of small mats or equipment nearby.
 - Offer a wide range of company programs, whether it is a walk or bike group or organized exercise activity (can be just 10 minutes long).
 - Provide resources and education - newsletters, bulletins, community guides, health fairs, guest speakers, instructors for a new activity or sport, etc.
 - Help staff to find a support group or buddy system to encourage each other.
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How can a physical activity program help your workplace?

Simply put, a workplace that supports physical activity provides and enhances the quality of life for workers, both inside and outside of the workplace. When workers are encouraged to be active, there can be benefits for both the workers and the company, such as:

- Improved worker health and wellness.
- Gains in productivity, creativity, and job performance.
- Decreases in absenteeism, work-related injuries, and occupational conditions or diseases.
- More positive morale and workplace culture.
- Enhanced corporate image.

It is important for organizations not only to analyze the cost of running a physical activity program in the short term, but also to see how it will benefit the organization in the long run.

How does a workplace get a program started?

Sometimes making small changes can support big results. The workers, management and committees can create ideas or initiate for the workplace. After acknowledging these ideas, a detailed plan of action can be the next step. In this step, plan the activities that can be developed for your specific workplace setting. After a program is in place, it should be monitored, evaluated and maintained.

- Encourage everyone to get a fitness evaluation or health risk appraisal from their doctor before starting any significant exercise program.
- Work with management to resolve multiple factors (such as physical work environment, scheduling of work tasks, etc.) that can influence the workers' capacity to be active.
- Help individuals find that one reason they need to get started and help them recognize that reasons to stay active may change over time.
- Encourage people to start with one small activity. Whatever their situation or ability, they can try a variety of activities to find out what is right for them.
- Provide the information that people need. Often the act of looking for information is the first step toward getting started.
- Allow participants to choose activities that they like to do.
- Invite potential participants to watch activities or to participate in a trial class to see if they are interested.
- Have a person trained in cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR) present at moderate to high physical activity sessions.
- Offer a variety of programs. Be sure there is a mixture of endurance, strength and flexibility activities.
- Participate in community physical activity events.

Where can I find more information?

More information on active living is available from the following organizations*:

- [Healthy Living](#), Health Canada.
- [Being Active](#), Public Health Agency of Canada
- [Alberta Centre for Active Living](#)

(*We have mentioned these organizations as a means of providing a potentially useful referral. You should contact the organization(s) directly for more information about their information and/or services. Please note that mention of these organizations does not represent a recommendation or endorsement by CCOHS of these organizations over others that you may know.)

[Adapted from: [Comprehensive Workplace Health Program Guide](#), CCOHS]

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