

Promoting physical activity in the workplace

This quick reference guide presents the recommendations made in 'Workplace health promotion: how to encourage employees to be physically active'. The guidance aims to help promote physical activity in the workplace.

It is for employers and professionals in small, medium and large organisations who have a direct or indirect role in, and responsibility for, improving health in the workplace. This includes those working in the NHS, local authorities and the wider public, voluntary, community and private sectors, especially those working in human resources or occupational health. It will also be of interest to employees, trades union representatives and members of the public.

Increasing physical activity levels will help prevent and manage over 20 conditions and diseases including cancer, coronary heart disease, diabetes and obesity. It can also help to promote mental wellbeing.

Many employers recognise that they have an obligation to the health and wellbeing of their workforce. Investing in the health of employees can also bring business benefits such as reduced sickness absence, increased loyalty and better staff retention.

The guidance complements and supports, but does not replace, NICE guidance on: physical activity and the environment, workplace smoking and obesity (see related NICE guidance on page 4 for a list of the publications).

NICE public health guidance 13

This guidance was developed using the NICE public health intervention process.

NICE public health guidance makes recommendations on the promotion of good health and the prevention of ill health. This guidance represents the views of the Institute and was arrived at after careful consideration of the evidence available. Implementation of this guidance is the responsibility of local commissioners and/or providers. Commissioners and providers are reminded that it is their responsibility to implement the guidance, in their local context, in light of their duties to avoid unlawful discrimination and to have regard to promoting equality of opportunity. Nothing in this guidance should be interpreted in a way which would be inconsistent with compliance with those duties.

Recommendations

These recommendations aim to help employers and workplace health professionals prevent the diseases associated with a lack of physical activity. The recommendations alone will not reverse the current obesity epidemic or other health trends associated with a sedentary lifestyle. However, efforts made in the workplace, alongside wider strategies to increase physical activity levels, could help improve people's health significantly.

Recommendation 1: policy and planning

Who should take action?

- Employers in organisations of all sizes (in larger organisations this might include their representatives, for example, human resources [HR] directors and senior managers).
- Public health professionals, occupational health professionals, workplace health promoters.
- Trades unions, other employee representatives, employees.

What action should they take?

- Develop an organisation-wide plan or policy to encourage and support employees to be more physically active. This should:
 - include measures to maximise the opportunity for all employees to participate
 - be based on consultation with staff and should ensure they are involved in planning and design, as well as monitoring activities, on an ongoing basis
 - be supported by management and have dedicated resources
 - set organisational goals and be linked to other relevant internal policies (for example, on alcohol, smoking, occupational health and safety, flexible working or travel)
 - link to relevant national and local policies (for example, on health or transport).

Recommendation 2: implementing a physical activity programme

Who should take action?

- Employers in organisations of all sizes (in larger organisations this might include their representatives, for example, HR directors and senior managers).
- Public health professionals, occupational health professionals, workplace health promoters.
- Trades unions, other employee representatives, employees.

What action should they take?

- Introduce and monitor an organisation-wide, multi-component programme to encourage and support employees to be physically active. This could be part of a broader programme to improve health. It could include:
 - flexible working policies and incentive schemes
 - policies to encourage employees to walk, cycle or use other modes of transport involving physical activity (to travel to and from work and as part of their working day)
 - the dissemination of information (including written information) on how to be more physically active and on the health benefits of such activity. This could include information on local opportunities to be physically active (both within and outside the workplace) tailored to meet specific needs, for example, the needs of shift workers
 - ongoing advice and support to help people plan how they are going to increase their levels of physical activity
 - the offer of a confidential, independent health check administered by a suitably qualified practitioner and focused on physical activity.

Recommendation 3: components of the physical activity programme

Who should take action?

- Employers in organisations of all sizes (in larger organisations this might include their representatives, for example, HR directors and senior managers).
- People responsible for buildings and facilities.
- Public health professionals, occupational health professionals, workplace health promoters.
- Trades unions, other employee representatives, employees.

What action should they take?

- Encourage employees to walk, cycle or use another mode of transport involving physical activity to travel part or all of the way to and from work (for example, by developing a travel plan).
- Help employees to be physically active during the working day by:
 - where possible, encouraging them to move around more at work (for example, by walking to external meetings)
 - putting up signs at strategic points and distributing written information to encourage them to use the stairs rather than lifts if they can
 - providing information about walking and cycling routes and encouraging them to take short walks during work breaks
 - encouraging them to set goals on how far they walk and cycle and to monitor the distances they cover.
- Take account of the nature of the work and any health and safety issues. For example, many people already walk long distances during the working day, while those involved in shift work may be vulnerable if walking home alone at night.

For further recommendations on how to encourage people to walk, cycle or use the stairs, see 'Promoting and creating built or natural environments that encourage and support physical activity' (NICE public health guidance 8).

Recommendation 4: supporting employers

Who should take action?

- Directors of public health, public health practitioners in the statutory and voluntary sectors.
- Local strategic partnerships.
- Private, statutory and voluntary organisations with responsibility for increasing physical activity levels or for occupational health.
- Trades unions, business federations, chambers of commerce.

What action should they take?

- Offer support to employers who want to implement this guidance to encourage their employees to be more physically active. Where appropriate and feasible, this should be provided on the employer's premises. It could involve providing information on, or links to, local resources. It could also involve providing advice and other information or resources (for example, the services of physical activity experts).
- If initial demand exceeds the resources available, focus on:
 - enterprises where a high proportion of employees are from a disadvantaged background
 - enterprises where a high proportion of employees are sedentary
 - small and medium-sized enterprises.

Implementation tools

NICE has developed tools to help organisations implement this guidance. For details see our website at www.nice.org.uk/PH013

Further information

You can download the following documents from www.nice.org.uk/PH013

- A quick reference guide (this document) for professionals and the public.
- The guidance, which includes the recommendations, details of how they were developed and evidence statements.
- Supporting documents, including an evidence review and an economic analysis.

For printed copies of the quick reference guide, phone NICE publications on 0845 003 7783 or email publications@nice.org.uk and quote N1582.

Related NICE guidance

Published

- Promoting and creating built or natural environments that encourage and support physical activity. NICE public health guidance 8 (2008). Available from: www.nice.org.uk/PH008
- Workplace health promotion: how to help employees to stop smoking. NICE public health guidance 5 (2007). Available from: www.nice.org.uk/PHI005
- Four commonly used methods to increase physical activity: brief interventions in primary care, exercise referral schemes, pedometers and community-based exercise programmes for walking and cycling. NICE public health guidance 2 (2006). Available from: www.nice.org.uk/PHI002
- Obesity: guidance on the prevention, identification, assessment and management of overweight and obesity in adults and children. NICE clinical guideline 43 (2006). Available from: www.nice.org.uk/CG043

Under development

- Guidance for employers on promoting mental wellbeing through productive and healthy working conditions. NICE public health guidance (due November 2008).

Updating the recommendations

This guidance will be updated as needed and information on the progress of any update will be posted on the NICE website (www.nice.org.uk/PH013).

© National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence, 2008. All rights reserved. This material may be freely reproduced for educational and not-for-profit purposes. No reproduction by or for commercial organisations, or for commercial purposes, is permitted without the express written permission of the Institute.

National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence ISBN 1-84629-712-5
MidCity Place, 71 High Holborn, London WC1V 6NA, www.nice.org.uk

N1582 1P 40k May 08