

About the Authors

Christina Loitz is the Knowledge Translation Specialist at the Alberta Centre for Active Living. Her work includes the development, implementation, and evaluation of knowledge translation activities.

Amy MacKinnon is an Active Living Coordinator at the Canadian Paraplegic Association (Alberta) where she coordinates the Adapted Adventures Program. She also offers adaptive adventure travel packages through her own company.

Alberta Centre for Active Living
11759 Groat Road
Edmonton, AB T5M 3K6
Phone: 780-427-6949
Toll-free: 1-800-661-4551
active.living@ualberta.ca
www.centre4activeliving.ca

-  /centre4activeliving
-  @4ActiveLiving
-  Centre4ActiveLiving1
-  4activeliving

ISSN 1187-7472



Workplace Physical Activity Programs for All: Focus on People with Mobility Issues

Christina Loitz, PhD, Knowledge Translation Specialist, Alberta Centre for Active Living & Amy MacKinnon, BPE, Active Living Coordinator, Canadian Paraplegic Association

The workplace can be an effective place to promote physical activity for all adults. Employers and employees recognize and appreciate the benefits that regular physical activity brings to participants and the workplace (Kuoppala, Lamminpaa, & Husman, 2008; Cancelliere, Cassidy, Ammendolia, & Cote, 2011; Canadian Council for Health and Active Living at Work, 2004).



Many workplaces offer programs and incentives promoting physical activity for employees. Unfortunately, some of these efforts unintentionally exclude people with mobility issues, particularly people who use wheelchairs. This article offers suggestions on how to make your workplace physical activity programs inclusive and welcoming to people of all levels of mobility.

Workplace physical activity incentives often include strategies such as:

- providing employees with access to an on-site gym;
- bringing physical activity classes to the workplace;
- short-term challenges, such as encouraging employees to be more physically active over a four- to 12-week period; and/or
- full or partial payment or rebates to employees for costs associated with physical activity participation, such as fitness classes.

Many of these efforts can be tailored to be more inclusive to people of various levels of mobility.

Physical Activity Challenges

Workplaces can encourage employees to increase their physical activity level through fun and friendly challenges, such as walking challenges (e.g., Walking Road Trip across Canada) or stair-climbing challenges. The main purpose of

*When creating an inclusive challenge, use **time or distance** (not steps) as the method of measuring physical activity participation.*

such challenges is to increase participants' moderate to vigorous physical activity levels over a set amount of time.

Here are some suggestions for developing inclusive challenges:

- Be creative when naming a challenge. Take the focus off walking as the only mode of transportation, e.g., use "Moving across Canada" instead of "Walking across Canada."
- Use *time or distance* (not steps) as the method of measuring physical activity participation. *Tip:* Use an odometer to measure distance traveled in a wheelchair. Odometers are available at many bicycle shops.
- If your challenge uses *steps* as the measure, provide a conversion calculation or table for time and distance (Niagara Region, 2011, p.27-28).

Time:

- 10 minutes of moderate physical activity = 100 steps
- 10 minutes of vigorous physical activity = 200 steps

Distance:

- 1 kilometre wheelchair odometer distance = 1250 steps
- Remind all participants that physical activity sessions can be as short as 10 minutes.
- As an alternative to Stair-climbing Challenges, do a Physical Activity Break Challenge. Encourage employees to do any physical activity for 10 minutes during their work break. Activities could include anything from "yoga at your desk" to walking or wheeling around the block.

Useful link:
*Physical Activity at Work:
Yoga @ Your Desk*

Physical Activity at Work

Workplace gyms and fitness classes encourage employees to be physically active by offering free, convenient access to exercise before or after work, or during work breaks. Workplace gyms that include the following equipment and criteria are more functional for people with reduced mobility or who use wheelchairs. Here are some recommendations:

- Equipment should be modifiable or useable by a person sitting in a wheelchair, e.g., hand-weights, exercise bands, medicine balls, arm-crank ergometer, or strength training machines where seats can be moved away for use by people in wheelchairs.
- Ensure a clear path of access is available to each piece of exercise equipment. Remove obstacles and use (or install) non-slip flooring.
- Place equipment so there is always room in front or beside each piece of equipment, so that a wheelchair user can readily transfer onto the exercise equipment e.g., chest press machine.
- Ask all employees what they would like to see in the fitness centre.
- Conduct a workplace fitness centre audit; contact an organization with expertise in physical activity for all mobility levels, such as the Canadian Paraplegic Association (Alberta) or the University of Alberta's Steadward Centre. For fitness classes at workplace locations, use facilities that are wheelchair-friendly or modifiable so that a wheelchair user can

participate. Use spaces that have non-slip flooring. Confirm that the instructor is able to lead a class for people with different mobility levels within the same class.

Financial Support or Incentives for Physical Activity

Workplaces can play an important role in supporting employees to be physically active, at work and elsewhere. For instance, many employers offer fitness rebates or personal health spending accounts. This type of support can help give all employees access to physical activities, services, resources and/or equipment. With this type of support, each employee can tailor their spending on physical activity in ways that best meet their personal circumstances or needs.

Here are some examples of physical activity supports, in four categories:

- equipment - cardiovascular equipment for the home (including arm ergometer), bikes, home gyms and weights, specialty equipment, gardening tools and garden boxes
- resources - books, videos, journals, magazines
- services - personal training, lifestyle counselling, exercise physiologist, childcare services provided while a parent participates in scheduled workouts or activities
- access - registration fees for any sport or physical activity; memberships for fitness, recreation, or sport clubs; ski hill/mountain passes, race registrations, transit passes

Employers can further assist employees by:

- exploring opportunities for free or discounted access to fully accessible recreation centres, fitness studios or fitness clubs;
- negotiating discounts for employees through Corporate Wellness programs that may be offered at larger, local recreation centres; and/or
- talking to owners of smaller fitness facilities (e.g., studios, gyms) to explore the possibility of an employee discount. One approach could be to arrange the discount in exchange for advertising placed in the workplace.

Looking Ahead

Providing workplace physical activity opportunities and support for all employees can benefit employer and workers. Some of the benefits can include:

- reduced absenteeism and sick leave (Kuoppala et al., 2008);
- promotion of a positive work environment (Cancelliere et al., 2011); and
- increased productivity and morale (Canadian Council for Health and Active Living at Work, 2004).

The first step for employers should be to ask employees, "How can our workplace support your physical activity participation?" This question can be asked informally at meetings, or perhaps through an anonymous staff survey. A combination of employee feedback and some or many of the recommendations from this article can support all employees' participation in physical activity.

Benefits of workplace physical activity include:

- *reduced absenteeism and sick leave;*
- *promotion of a positive work environment; and*
- *increased productivity and morale.*



References

- Canadian Council for Health and Active Living at Work. (2004). Frequently asked questions about physical activity in the workplace. Retrieved from <http://www.cchaw.ca/english/faq.aro>
- Cancelliere, C., Cassidy, J. D., Ammendolia, C., & Cote, P. (2011). Are workplace health promotion programs effective at improving presenteeism in workers? A systematic review and best evidence synthesis of the literature. *BMC Public Health*, 11, 395. doi: 10.1186/1471-2458-11-395
- Kuoppala, J., Lamminpaa, A., & Husman, P. (2008). Work health promotion, job well-being, and sickness absences--a systematic review and meta-analysis. *Journal of Occupational and Environmental Medicine*, 50, 1216-1227. doi: 10.1097/JOM.0b013e31818dbf92
- Niagara Region. (2011). Walk for Wellness Challenge: Workplace Program Team Captain's Manual. Retrieved from http://www.niagararegion.ca/living/health_wellness/workplace/walk-for-wellness.aspx

Disclaimer:

The views and opinions expressed herein are those of the author/s and do not necessarily reflect the views and opinions of the Alberta Centre for Active Living or the WellSpring Advisory Committee.

Planning and Motivation for Healthy Lifestyles

Honourable Dave Rodney, Associate Minister of Wellness

Welcome to 2014, and welcome to the opportunity to increase your personal wellness during this New Year. I know it may sound cliché, but this is a great time to make changes and get motivated to lead a healthy lifestyle.

Many Albertans see this time of year as a time to make changes in their lives – exercising more, changing their diet or taking up a new hobby. Even if we know that making changes is beneficial, sometimes things get in our way. Mental, physical and motivational factors are barriers that many of us face.

It can be helpful to identify what barriers are keeping you from reaching your goal. Knowing what they are can help you come up with a plan to move past them. For example, it's a good idea to set both long- and short-term goals that are realistic. Meeting a short-term goal can provide the motivation to keep moving towards your long-term goal.

Having support is also key. It can be easier to stick to your goal of getting more exercise, for example, if you plan to do that as part of a group. Taking fresh air breaks at work together (whether walking, wheeling or running), organizing a noon-hour yoga group, joining a recreational league or taking fitness or meditation classes with a friend can not only be more fun, but can give you extra motivation to keep going.

Whatever you set as your personal wellness target, having a plan to overcome barriers, setting realistic goals and making sure you have support will all help you be successful.

I wish you all the best in 2014.



Honourable Dave Rodney (BA, BEd, MRE), MLA Calgary-Lougheed, has been a wellness champion during his three Legislative terms—during which he has served on over 2 dozen committees. He is an entrepreneur, filmmaker, writer, keynote speaker, educator, and is the first Canadian to summit Mt. Everest two times. He founded the "Top of the World Society for Children" with his wife Jennifer; and they have two wonderful sons.