

Easy Ways to Incorporate Movement into the Workday

Make it motivational

When it comes to workplace wellness, a little competition can be the spark needed to push your office to a healthier lifestyle and build unity. Invite employees to form teams and use pedometers to track the number of steps each team takes, offering rewards to the first group to reach a designated goal. Some innovative companies are revamping their conference rooms with treadmills to encourage movement in otherwise sedentary blocks of the day, or taking away wastebaskets to force people to get up and find a trash can. Some are designating portions of the office space as ballet centers, providing Wii fitness in a conference room, or carving out corners of the office for fitness activities.

Just stand

Another solution is to explore adjustable sit/stand workstations that contribute to the comfort, ergonomics and wellness of workers. These types of solutions will appeal to the so-called 'worried well' group, giving them ways to improve their own health while working, while also catering to—rather than singling out—those with pre-existing conditions. The benefits are clear: after a year of standing just 3 additional hours each day, one can burn up to 30,000 extra calories and eight pounds of fat. In addition, it's the equivalent of running about ten marathons. Switching between a seated and standing position periodically throughout the day has been proven to help increase energy, burn extra calories, tone muscles, improve posture, reduce blood sugar levels and ramp up metabolism. Standing also improves blood flow and oxygen levels in the brain leading to increased energy, alertness and focus.

Build it in to Multi-tasking:

Multitasking? Whether or not it's a listed skill requirement of your job, you most likely put it to use managing your daily workload. So why not employ it with exercise? If you spend a lot of your work time on far-from engaging tasks like making a lot of copies and faxes or listening in on long conference calls, you can still sneak in a workout. Try exercises like these:

- Use a hands-free headset for conference calls so that you can walk around as you listen and talk.
- Practice stretching and breathing exercises at the copier.
- During meetings, draw your abdominal muscles in and out.
- When you're working at your computer, use an exercise ball as your office chair.

Pace while you're on the phone.

Chances are, you spend most of your day sitting down. Unless you need to be on your computer at the same time, you might as well take advantage of the opportunity to stand up and move around while you're on a call. Every extra step counts, and it'll be a welcome break for your back and your muscles. Remember: Physical activity doesn't have to be formal exercise to have its benefits: Even simple, unconscious fidgeting is good for your muscles and can burn some calories. Plus, you may find that the movement helps keep you focused and alert.

Get on the Ball!

Sitting on a stability ball also strengthens your abdominal muscles because those are the muscles your body uses to compensate for changes in balance. Basically, you're getting a low-intensity abdominal workout every time you sit down -- and those hours add up. Finally, one study found that children's attention increases when they sit on stability balls. While no studies have been done on how stability balls affect adults' attention, it's possible we'd feel the same effects.

Deep Breathing

You likely don't pay much attention to your breath. After all, you do it all day long and it's completely automatic. But, becoming more aware of your breath, and performing a few deep breathing exercises can produce a natural relaxation response. Deep breathing is so powerful that The American Institute of Stress even named it the 'best stress reduction technique' of all. Deep breathing increases the supply of oxygen to your brain and helps promote a state of calmness. Additionally, breathing techniques assist you in focusing on your body, which can quiet your mind. Although there are a variety of breathing techniques - some combine breathing with visualization - taking a few slow, deep belly breaths can provide immediate stress relief.

The Seated Leg Raiser

When pay raises are nowhere to be seen, consider the leg raise. (Bonus: they're hardly noticeable underneath the desk!) While seated, straighten one or both legs and hold in place for five or more seconds. Then lower the leg(s) back to the ground without letting the feet touch the floor. Repeat (alternating legs if raising them separately) for 15 reps. Underwhelmed? Loop a purse or briefcase strap over the ankle for added weight, or for more of an abs workout, add a crunch.

Use Your Chair

Sitting in your swivel chair with your back straight and feet hovering just off the floor, place just your fingertips on the edge of your desk. Contract your core and use your abs to twist slowly to the left and then the right. Try for 10 twists to each side, three times throughout the workday. Every time you return to your desk chair — whether it's from a meeting, a bathroom break or a vending machine run — do five squats before settling in. With feet slightly wider than shoulder width apart and the chest lifted, sit down and back, tapping your rear lightly on the seat before pushing up through the heels to return to standing.

Progressive Muscle Relaxation

Stress can cause you to tense certain muscles in your body. Over time, you may become so accustomed to that tension that you stop noticing that your muscles are tight. Sore muscles — especially in the neck and shoulders — can stem from chronic tension. Progressive muscle relaxation lets go of that tension. Focus on slowly tensing and then relaxing your muscles, one group at a time. Start with your toes and work your way up to your neck. With practice, you'll increase your awareness of when you're tensing your muscles and you'll learn to let go of that tension.

So how do you work out when you have a physically demanding job? Here are a few tips to keep in mind:

Take advantage of weekends by doing some moderate weightlifting — kettlebells are great for functional training! — and cardio like running or Spinning if you want to give your feet a break. Stretch every day to develop flexibility. This will ward off injuries. After all, you don't want to pull a muscle. Lifting heavy things at work? Do a few extra reps as you go along to sculpt your guns on the job.

Tennis ball roll

Foot discomfort, especially bottom of foot pain, can occur when you stand or walk for long periods of time. One of the simplest ways to alleviate some of that pain is to roll a tennis ball under your feet. It sounds simple, but it can really make a difference. For best results, sit in a chair and remove your shoes and socks. Place a tennis ball on the floor and press down on it lightly with the bottom of your foot. Roll it around for a few minutes, or as long as you want. Do this with both feet.