



PHYSICAL ACTIVITY

Yes, it really is that important

Physical activity has always been and will always be a central component of workplace wellness—as it should be. The list of benefits is long and often repeated within our industry and among others who promote health.

First findings published in 1958

Even before workplace wellness, even before the obesity epidemic, a chorus from different groups has long praised the benefits of physical activity. The first scientific evidence to support the benefits of activity likely came from Dr. Jerry Morris, a London physician who observed that the drivers on London's now famous double-decker buses had higher rates of heart disease than the more active conductors, who spent their days trudging up and down stairs punching tickets. He published his findings in 1958, and since then, a mountain of evidence has grown to prove the actual benefits of physical activity.

Individuals who are more active live longer

Physical activity has always been and will always be a central component of workplace wellness—as it should be. The list of benefits is long and often repeated within our industry and among others who promote health. What stands out among the benefits, however, is that individuals who are more active live longer. Even those who complete less than the recommended 150 minutes per week of moderate to vigorous activity have a far lower mortality risk compared to individuals who are sedentary. To put it more starkly, inactivity increases your chances of an early death, but as you engage in more activity, that risk plummets for individuals completing two to three times the recommended amount of activity each week. But in addition to adding years to your life, physical activity can also add life to your years.

Good for the mind and body

Recent evidence has shown that being active can reduce markers of inflammation while also boosting hormones and biochemicals that promote brain health. Scientists don't yet fully understand how this works, but together with widely reported improvements in mood following physical activity, this helps reinforce the impact it can have on not only physical health but on our mental well-being too.

Where Vitality comes in

Programs continue to innovate in an attempt to find more effective ways to help people be more active. This ranges from the rather simple approach of providing a structure for individuals to set goals to be more active, to sophisticated incentive structures that seek to nudge people gently toward being more intrinsically motivated to be active.

Vitality's Active Rewards® + Apple Watch is just one example of this, and we've seen impressive results since its launch in 2016. Results from the program thus far show that it increases the number of days per month that people are physically active by 110 percent, it increases overall program satisfaction by 57 percent, and it is creating a more engaging environment by proof of an increase in digital platform engagement by 3 times.

On average, Vitality members who participate in Vitality Active Rewards + Apple Watch experience the following:

110%

increase in days physically active per month*

57%

increase in program satisfaction

3x

increase in digital platform engagement

*Increase refers to meeting qualifying event for the Active Rewards + Apple Watch program.



The future is now

As we march toward a future bathed in tech, workplace wellness has not only fully embraced physical activity as a modifier of poor health and disease, but programs and individuals have also fully embraced technology to help them track their physical activity. Device manufacturers will continue to develop their products to remain competitive and hopefully make device usage even more seamless and simple than it already is. Whether or not the increasingly sophisticated features of these devices actually increase physical activity is still up for debate, but even activity monitors with all the bells and whistles still contain two simple characteristics that have been proven to increase activity.

Just wearing an activity monitor and with the ability to view your daily activity levels in the form of steps per day increases physical activity. When we also provide a target for people (for example, 10,000 steps per day), we see they increase their activity even more. By themselves, these two characteristics are not going to solve the inactivity issue, but the power of these simple features shouldn't be lost on workplace wellness and individuals who participate in these programs. The access to activity monitors keeps growing each year as that market continues to mature. Less is known about long-term use of these devices, but there is a strong argument supported by scientific evidence that activity monitors can help inactive or low-active individuals become more active. In scientific circles, "physical activity" and

"exercise" refer to different things. Physical activity can be for transportation, occupation or leisure. It can be incidental as we move through our day. Exercise is a deliberate form of physical activity, the sole purpose of which is to promote health. Workplace wellness programs must understand that the vast majority of individuals engage in physical activity: They find ways to increase their daily amount of steps without engaging in a specific exercise session. That is exactly why we introduced a range of daily step levels in 2013. If we want to help people increase their activity levels, we have to provide everyone a way to be recognized. That includes fairly active individuals who are aiming higher, but more importantly sedentary individuals who are just starting out on their physical activity journey.

By providing many different ways to be active, we can meet individuals where they are by providing a structure under which they can be recognized for their efforts—no matter how they choose to do it.

To increase physical activity—and reap the benefits—as an industry—we must recognize the key role of technology in permitting us to gather individual physical activity data. Just as important is recognizing that individuals can be active in many different ways. An inclusive approach that does not discriminate between types of activities will encourage everyone to be active in their own ways, all the while improving their health.

REFERENCES

Arem et al. (2015, June) Leisure Time Physical Activity and Mortality. Retrieved from <https://jamanetwork.com/journals/jamainternalmedicine/fullarticle/2212267>



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