

Thinking On Your Feet

Unfortunately you can't bank the benefits of exercise from your youth, hoping it will help you 40 years down the line. The ideal scenario is to have been active throughout your lifespan but research has shown that your health can benefit from physical activity at any age, meaning it doesn't matter when you start, as long as you start!

INACTIVITY IS THE FOURTH BIGGEST KILLER

But that's hard for many of us, particularly if our jobs involve long periods of sitting. Sedentary (low activity) behaviour, increases the risk of heart disease, obesity, diabetes and cancer. The latest research shows when it comes to heart disease, leading a sedentary life is as great a risk factor as smoking and obesity. In fact, the World Health Organisation listed physical inactivity as the fourth biggest risk factor for death in adults across the world.

In fact inactivity in terms of disease risk, is more dangerous than being overweight. The most current research has shown that even normal weight individuals that are inactive are at risk of developing disease. There is a molecular pathway that is essential to burning fats, that shuts down with inactivity, and that subsequently increases your risk of developing cardiovascular disease.

The good news is that we can combat the negative effects of prolonged sitting (total of 8 hours or more) with just 60-75 minutes of moderate intensity physical activity a day.

The reality is that often hectic schedules can make it seem impossible to fit workouts into your busy week. The prospect of packing a gym bag, trudging to your local gym, working out, showering, changing, and trudging back to where you came from, can feel like a lot of effort. The reality is that when we neglect exercise, we put both our physical and mental health at risk, which in turn can negatively impact your productivity and effectiveness at work.

BEING MORE ACTIVE IN THE WORKPLACE

On the contrary, people who exercise

Physical activity or exercise, when performed regularly, has been proven to prevent and manage over 20 chronic conditions. These include coronary heart disease, stroke, type 2 diabetes, cancer, obesity, mental health problems and musculoskeletal conditions.

during the workday are usually more productive, even though they may log fewer hours. As we all know, quantity rarely relates to quality! Here are some ways that being more active in the workplace, can make you better at what you do.

1 YOU ARE MORE PRODUCTIVE

Physical activity is 'cognitive candy'. Research studies have demonstrated that looking after your health and wellbeing leads to noticeable improvements in productivity and performance at work. People who exercise more than 10,000 steps a day and go to the gym 3 times a week have a greater ability to plan, remember, simulate scenarios and make decisions along with improved alertness, energy, anger and stress level control over their counterparts who did not perform exercise. Research has also concluded that any increase in activity level will have a beneficial effect, so whether your baseline is nothing or pretty healthy, an increase in activity can see a minimum increase in productivity by 10%.

2 A CREATIVITY AND FOCUS BOOSTER

Stuck in a rut? Lacking inspiration? Got lots of problems to solve but no idea how or where to start? Studies show that workers exercising more than four times a week were more able to think creatively than their sedentary colleagues. Exercising on a regular basis can allow for cognitive enhancement, promoting creativity in an inexpensive and healthy way. Similarly research has shown that creative performance in workers who exercise, decreased when they were completely at rest. In other words increased activity levels had a direct effect on creativity levels.

3 PROFESSIONAL NETWORK EXPANSION

Once upon a time, business networking used to take place over boozy lunches or lavish weekends. Thankfully the corporate environment seems to be making some changes in this area with stricter spending, tighter entertainment allowances and more concern for public perception (not to mention the awareness of corporate enticement). With a growing population of health conscious individuals, we may see



corporate networking being re-named 'sweatworking' – joining colleges over a gym class, cycle, run, walk, tennis game or yoga retreat. Whether this is just a healthier environment to have discussion, and make decisions or a place where fitness friends can flourish into business partners; physical activity and business networking is definitely a healthier and more creative alternative.

4 OUTDOOR BENEFITS

Taking your exercise outdoors, rather than in a gym, may multiply the inherent physical and mental benefits of getting your body moving, even further. There are positive effects of exposure to nature that can last for up to seven hours after the experience. So if you're thinking twice about walking to work or taking a stroll at lunchtime, think about how good it could make you feel for the rest of the day. Studies have shown that people who live closer to trees and other green spaces are less likely to be obese, inactive or reliant on anti-depressant medication. The next time you're organising an away day or team bonding event, why not consider incorporating outdoor activities such as sports, cycling or hiking, and enjoy the extra benefits of being out in nature.

BEING ACTIVE IN THE WORKPLACE

An office workout can vary widely in type and intensity – from swapping your desk chair for a stability ball or a standing desk, to going for a run during your lunch break.

In addition to the physical benefits to your body of squeezing more exercise into your day, it doesn't always have to mean cardiovascular exercise like walking, running or cycling. Building physical strength and stretching tight muscles is also really important when it comes to maintaining good postures and avoiding injury from tight structures.

Standing and moving about regularly during the day relieves these negative effects. Some simple strength and stretching exercises at your desk or in an outside hall or empty meeting room, will benefit your muscles and joints, and reduce

the risk of suffering from back and neck pain. Regular stretches can also release tight muscles that can become painful and develop into headaches.

Having regular breaks and doing some sort of activity every 30 to 60 minutes not only adds to the cumulative beneficial effects of being active but also helps break the cycle of poor posture and reduces the risk of musculoskeletal pain that can come with it.

WORKSTATION CULPRITS

It's important to ensure that your workstation is properly set up, with correct ergonomics. Ask your therapist for advice on ensuring your desk, chair and computer are all set at the correct angles and heights to prevent slouching, over-reaching and chin forward (poking) postures that can have serious effects on your skeletal system.

It is also essential that your keyboard and mouse are positioned correctly with adequate cushioning and support for your forearm and wrist. Carpal tunnel syndrome can be a very debilitating problem and can often be avoided or combatted by simple adjustments to your workstation. It is caused by poor posture of your wrist and the repetitive nature of using a mouse which results in pressure build up on your nerves in your wrist. In addition to changing your desk set up, your therapist will also have exercises and stretches they can give you, to treat and relieve carpal tunnel pain.

Traditionally the keyboard and mouse were always blamed for carpal tunnel syndrome and other hand or wrist pains developed during the working day. However, new research suggests that they are not the only culprits – technique-related factors like how hard you 'hit' the keys on the keyboard, 'hovering', gripping the mouse too tightly, 'strike action' with the index finger, repetitive strain and vibration are all contributing factors to developing pains or musculoskeletal conditions in the hand. Other examples include trigger finger, an inflammation of the tendon sheath in your finger or thumb caused from repetitive bending.

Pressing the mouse button with excessive force can even result in tennis elbow (lateral epicondylitis). In many cases, pain and symptoms experienced in the

fingers are actually the result of problems in other areas of the body, such as the neck, shoulder, elbow or wrist. Sustained pressure or abnormal postures for prolonged periods of time can result in changes in nerves and tendons along the upper limb (arm) from the neck, causing pain and discomfort further down in the hand and fingers.

Again your therapist or workplace health manager will be able to give you some advice on how to change your technique and keyboard set up to prevent any hand or wrist problems developing in the future.

All in all, the more active you can be at work, the more benefits there are to both your physical as well as mental health. It comes down to breaking old unhealthy habits and forming new ones a little at a time. Making movement an integral part of your daily routine will result in more energy, a healthier heart and body, better concentration, creativity, memory, less pain and headaches, and improved communication and socialising with colleagues – which collectively will make your whole workplace a healthier and happier place to be.

Ask your therapist for more workplace resources including ideas for increasing activity levels in the workplace, setting up workstations and reducing or relieving wrist pain.



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