MODULE 2: IMPROVING PHYSICAL HEALTH
Improving Physical Health

By the end of this module you will:

- Understand why physical health is important for both employees and the organisation.
- Learn effective ways to promote and maintain physical health.
- Be able to identify and reduce physical health issues in your own organisation.

Why physical health is important?

In many modern workplaces, it is very easy for an employee to go through the working day having done very little exercise or any type of physical exertion. This is especially a problem in organisations or roles where employees are required to sit at a desk all day. Side effects include posture problems, weight gain, heart disease and poor blood circulation. Whilst this is undoubtedly bad for the employee, it can also take its toll on the organisation, with an increased risk of sickness-related absence and potential employee turnover.

Conversely, jobs that are very physically taxing can also have negative health implications. Evidence has found that, occupations that require a high level of physical activity can also result in negative health implications such as a greater risk of heart disease. Although it may seem that work which requires physical labour may provide the employee with the physical activity they need, it is not the right kind of physical activity and many manual labour workers do not get the relaxation or down time time they need.

This is equally bad for the employee and can result in sickness-related absence and high employee turnover.

It is important for all employees, regardless of the nature of their job, to have a variety of fitness related benefits available to them. His can help combat a range of work-related health implications including:

- A reduced risk of cardiovascular disease and stroke
- A reduced risk of high blood pressure and high cholesterol
- A reduced risk of some cancers such as colon and breast cancer
- A lower risk of type 2 diabetes
- Achieving and maintaining a healthy weight
- Increased muscle and bone strength
- Increased energy and improved sleep
**Why physical health is important?**

Whilst this is clearly beneficial to employees, as an organisation the benefits include:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Physical Health Benefits</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Reduced sickness-related absenteeism</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>We need to address the root of the problem before employee sickness absence even takes place. Proactively supporting and maintaining our employees’ wellbeing is a business necessity. It is important that our employees don’t have to wait for support in times of need, whether they need help with stress impacting their mental health or physical aches and pains. Fast access to support reduces the burden placed on our employees and decreases the amount of time, if any, that they take off work to recuperate. As a result, employees will be more likely to take better care of themselves amidst the increasing burdens of modern day living.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Increased productivity</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>It is well known that exercise releases endorphins, increases energy, and improves mood. This translates, on an organisational level, as a workforce that is more motivated and in a better position to fulfil their roles within the organisation.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Reduced turnover and increased retention</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>A work environment that motivates employees and allows them to physically thrive creates a workforce with high levels of job-related satisfaction and a sense that their needs are being provided for. This in turn will mean that your employees will feel valued and are more likely to stay in the employment of the organisation for longer.</td>
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</table>
What can we do to promote physical health in the workplace?

There are a variety of ideas and initiatives that can help promote and maintain a healthy workforce. These vary in cost from small inexpensive gestures to more costly and impactful schemes. Below is a list of ideas to improve workplace health by cost and impact.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cost</th>
<th>Initiatives</th>
<th>Impact</th>
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</table>
| Low   | • Tips for staying active at your desk  
         • Healthy snacks  
         • Incentives for staying active, such as a weekly prize for those with the most steps | These low cost, easy to implement initiatives are great ways to push employees in the right direction. Whilst they may not have the largest impact, they are small ways that can help the employees on a frequent basis. |
| Medium | • Employ the use of standing desks  
         • Cycle to work schemes  
         • Support for people struggling with smoking or other addictions | A mid-range priced initiative such as these are good for helping employees with those daily health issues that require something a bit more than just a nudge in the right direction. |
| High  | • Free gym memberships  
         • Break rooms and sufficient break times that allow for proper recuperation  
         • On-site/visiting physical therapists, fitness instructors, and other health professionals | The most expensive solutions are best for tackling the more major health and fitness issues. These have the largest impact on the employees as they allow for a very hands-on approach. Whilst they are the more expensive options they are also the options that are likely to have the best ROI. |
Case Study

ZAPPOS

Zappos offers all the classic health and fitness initiatives that work well to improve employee health such as gym memberships, nap rooms, and fitness classes. But they take it one step further; they believe that the traditional forms of health and fitness initiatives are too heavily relied on. And so, they employ the use of “Wellness Adventures”: employees are asked to come up with fun fitness activities that they can take part in during their lunch breaks with activities including laser tag, basketball, and trampolining. By ‘playing’ it keeps their employees fit and active without making it feel like a chore. It can encourage comradery and team building, as well as simply allowing employees to have fun and enjoy themselves. It shows that when developing a wellbeing strategy, it is important and can be very beneficial to think outside the box.

Expert Opinions:

"Found that when the employees of a large agricultural business participated in the workplace wellness programme available to them, there were vast improvements to their living and health including lower intakes of fat, increased weekly aerobic exercise, and more physical energy."

Dr Ray M Merill, Brigham Young University

"We should be doing at least two and a half hours of moderate intensity aerobic physical activity over the week, which is about half an hour each day, e.g. walking briskly, water aerobics, ballroom dancing, and gardening. The more you do beyond this, the higher the benefits; so an hour a day would provide more extensive health benefits."

Office of Disease Prevention and Health Promotion
**Fun Facts:**

Research has found that:

1. Employees who eat healthy are **25%** more likely to have higher job performance.

2. Employees who exercise for at least 30 minutes, 3 times a week, are **15%** more likely to have higher job performance.

And healthy employees take fewer sick days. Absenteeism is **27%** lower for those workers who eat healthy and regularly exercise.

Exercise increases blood flow to the brain making you more aware and therefore more productive.  

Effective wellbeing programmes have been found to have positive long-term effects including:

- Reduced systolic blood pressure
- Reduction in stress
- Reduction in poor sleep quality
- Lower levels of fatigue

US employees who did not meet the Center for Disease Control and Prevention’s recommended weekly physical activity lost half an hour of weekly productive time. In a workforce of 1000 employees this equates to 24,960 hours of lost time annually.

Sources:

Ask Yourself...

- How important is health and fitness currently in your organisation?
- What kind of physical activity would most benefit your employees regarding the nature of their jobs?
- Do the health initiatives available to the employees benefit them both in and out of work?
- Are you thinking outside of the box and not just using the traditional methods of promoting health and fitness?

Exercise One:

For each of the below problems, brainstorm what the possible solutions could be to tackle and overcome these problems:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Problem</th>
<th>Solution</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Many of the employees that are required to work at desks all day have reported cramping and aches in their legs as well as headaches. How can this be prevented?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Lunch breaks are not being used to their fullest potential with many employees eating their lunch and then just sitting in the lunchroom and chatting. How can lunch breaks be better used to improve the employees' physical health?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Much of the workforce have reported they are having trouble sleeping, and as a result it is having a negative impact on their productivity. What can be done to change this?</td>
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Exercise Two:

Use the below table to document your ideas of what the employee and organisational benefits of the different health initiatives could be:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Health issue</th>
<th>Solutions</th>
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<td>1.</td>
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<td>2.</td>
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<td>4.</td>
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<td>5.</td>
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</table>

Exercise Three:

Use the below table to document your ideas of what the employee and organisational benefits of the different health initiatives could be:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Initiative</th>
<th>Employee Benefit</th>
<th>Organisational Benefit</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Providing free healthy snacks (i.e. fruit in the kitchen or main office area)</td>
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<td>On-site/visiting counsellors for help with addiction</td>
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<td>Develop a travel plan and help/encourage employees to walk or cycle for example to work as part of their commute (e.g. implement a cycle to work scheme)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Promote/Encourage the use of stairs instead of lifts</td>
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<tr>
<td>Screen breaks</td>
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Useful Links/Resources

The Healthy Eating Plate, created by nutrition experts at Harvard School of Public Health and editors at Harvard Health Publications, is designed to, in a simple format, help people make the best eating choices:

https://www.hsph.harvard.edu/nutritionsource/healthy-eating-plate/

The Stress Management Society has reported on how the workforce’s physical wellbeing can affect the overall organisation:


Healthy Matters, an Australian organisation that helps people improve their exercise, eating habits, stress and time management, have created a poster that offers 8 ways to allow for more exercise in a daily routine:

https://www.healthymatters.net.au/8-tips-can-fit-exercise-daily-routine/

The Stress Management Society has reported on how your diet influences your mood and your ability to work:

FREE Business Stress Consultation

We provide a range of services across the UK and internationally. We are always happy to discuss how we can support you. Please get in touch today and take the first step in reducing the impact of stress in your organisation.

We look forward to supporting your wellbeing journey.

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We have supported many organisations, including

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