



Taking active breaks at work

In today's world, millions of people spend most of their work days at their desks in front of their computers.

With a little planning and motivation, you can make active breaks work for you. An active break can be as simple as taking a 10-minute walk during your lunch hour or coffee break or attending regular exercise sessions either at your workplace or a nearby fitness facility.

Planning active breaks into your day can do wonders for your productivity. In fact, research has shown that those who are physically active during the day tend to be more productive at work.

The Canadian Physical Activity Guidelines recommend that adults accumulate at least 150 minutes of moderate or vigorous aerobic physical activity each week in bouts of 10 minutes or more.

Get moving: take an active break

Here are some simple and easy steps you can take to get moving during work hours:

- Take daily breaks from your work and go for a short walk. Over time, try increasing your distances or taking multiple short breaks several times a day.
- Take a few minutes for some easy, natural stretching. Do this several times a day at your desk or in a private area, such as a fitness space. If you go for a walk, include a few minutes for gentle stretching.
- Join a lunch-hour fitness program. Choose a time that works for you—in the evening, for example, or before work. Choose activities that you can also do on your own time so it can become a regular part of your routine.
- Consider taking public transportation and daily walks to transit stops. Try to enjoy the walks and the fact that they allow you to be more active.
- For those with disabilities, or medical or mobility issues, take breaks that are right for you and approved by your doctor. If you have a medical condition, you may be able to participate in or modify some of the exercises in a fitness class.
- Support fundraising events with your co-workers for charitable causes that support active living. Gear up for

events by training regularly with your co-workers; this can be good for both your health and teambuilding.

- Host walking meetings for smaller meetings that have clear and manageable agendas. Getting outside for a walk can invigorate participants and encourage creativity—plus, when the meeting is over, everyone will have a little more energy when they return to work.

Take active breaks that you enjoy

Many fitness professionals recommend you get involved in physical activities or sports that you enjoy. In other words, don't run at lunchtime if running is not your thing; you might lose interest. Choose an activity that you prefer, like a yoga class, for instance. If it's something you like, you'll be more likely to continue with it on your own time.

In many workplaces, there are organized or occasional activities to get involved in, such as running clubs, biking clubs and fitness sessions. If there aren't any events or activities happening at your workplace, try to initiate one. You'll be glad you did and you might find that your co-workers are eager to get moving themselves.

Longer active breaks are catching on

In addition to supporting their employees in taking short active breaks, many employers are taking proactive steps toward promoting lengthier active breaks.

Longer breaks are designed to nurture teambuilding, provide a break from normal routines and encourage employees to participate in physical activities that they normally wouldn't do at work.

The activities shouldn't be too physically demanding and they should be carefully chosen so most employees can feel like the activity is still practical and fun. These kinds of breaks don't have to be strictly fitness-related and should be chosen or suggested by employees. The more ownership employees are encouraged to take, the better they'll feel about participating.

Typically, this could be a half- or full-day activity during a normal work day, such as a summer-time baseball game or a winter walk. In other cases, an employer may choose to promote a quarterly or seasonal active break.

- For example, the Alberta Centre for Active Living in Edmonton has a tradition of giving all staff the time to go out of the office on an active break four times per year. Each active break is planned to include everyone on the team, providing an exceptional teambuilding opportunity.
- In the summer and fall, staff members go for a half-day walk in one of the parks in Edmonton's river valley.
- Near the winter holiday season, staff members volunteer at the Edmonton Food Bank. This is an active day of sorting donated food, bagging produce, filling hampers and doing other tasks. Staff members get to be active while helping the wider community at the same time.
- Finally, in the spring, staff members donate one day of work to Habitat for Humanity—helping with work at building sites or at Re-Store, where donated building materials are sold. With a little coaching, volunteers learn to help with painting, assembly work, landscaping, construction tasks and other physical tasks.

Seasonal and quarterly active living breaks are a win-win for both employees and employers:

- Employees win with a break from their routine and some added exercise during their work day.
- Employers win through improved employee morale and overall satisfaction. Plus, in cases where the activity involves doing work for a charitable cause, these kinds of activities also generate goodwill for both employers and employees in the wider community.

Listen to yourself—and the experts

Increasingly, research is showing that being sedentary for too long too many days a week is poor for our health, even if we're reasonably active outside of work hours.

Taking regular active breaks at work can reduce some of this time you spend sitting and improve your physical and mental health. In fact, for most people, increasing the amount of physical activity you do is a great way to improve your mental health and overall well-being.

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