

PEROSH PHYSICAL EXERCISE AND SEDENTARY BEHAVIOUR GOOD PRACTICE CHECK LIST

THE PEROSH WELLBEING GROUP

Purpose

The purpose of this article is to provide a simple check list for workplaces that wish to do more to support everyone at work to be physically active and to reduce sedentary behaviour.

These good practice points will apply more to certain worksites than others¹. Also, these issues will apply more to certain workers within each workplace. This guidance, however, is aimed at the entire workplace rather than targeting specific groups. In reality, this generic guidance will have to be altered to fit with local circumstance, and also a wide range of workplaces and job types.

Background

Physical activity is essential for good health, improves mental wellbeing, reduces sickness absence and reduces workplace accidents. In addition to the health benefits of increasing physical exercise, there is increasing evidence that regular sedentary behaviour can be harmful to health. Sedentary behaviour is a term used to describe prolonged sitting at work without regular active breaks.² The workplace may provide an environment which supports an increase in physical activity and a reduction in sedentary behaviour. In other words, reducing prolonged sitting as the main part of your job role. Various successful initiatives already in use include regular work breaks, walking meetings, supporting stair usage, stand up meetings, providing information about exercise routes for walkers and runners and supplying exercise facilities in the workplace.

The brief document is intended to help employers and workers how best to approach these issues at work, and was developed by the multidisciplinary PEROSH wellbeing group.

More detailed background is available; from these references [1-8].

Essential and desirable Good Practice Points are summarised below for both physical exercise at work, and reversing sedentary behaviour at work.

¹ For example, workplaces that employ workers that are involved in heavy physical activity as part of their work may not feel it necessary to develop any policy or guidance.

² Thorp, A.A (2011). Sedentary behaviour and subsequent work outcomes in adults. *Am J Prev Med*, 41(2): 207-215

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PEROSH *ESSENTIAL* Practice Points

IT IS GOOD PRACTICE TO:

1. Obtain management support for any policy relating to supporting physical activity or reducing sedentary behaviours at work.
2. Develop a policy to support everyone at work to be more physically active or to reduce sedentary behaviours. This must include provision for those with disabilities.
3. Make sure that any policy you develop at work complies with local health and safety legislation, and local and national legal frameworks.
4. Discuss these policies with workers and their representatives, in order to plan and design ways to increase physical activity and reduce sedentary behaviours. Refine the policy in light of consultation if required.
5. Identify exemplars, or champions within organisations, to promote the issues of physical activity and sedentary behaviour.

In relation to increasing physical activity at work; IT IS GOOD PRACTICE TO:

6. Give everyone at work information, including written information, about the health benefits of physical activity and how to become more physically active.

In relation to reducing sedentary behaviour at work; IT IS GOOD PRACTICE TO:

7. Ensure that the organisation (including senior and line management) informs all employees of the adverse health consequences of sedentary behaviour and embeds strategies to minimise prolonged sitting within standard operating procedures.

Successful approaches will need to alter longer-term behaviours. Examples of workplace interventions could include the provision of sit-stand desks, standing meeting tables, walking meetings and regular short walking breaks.

PEROSH *DESIRABLE* Practice points

IT IS GOOD PRACTICE TO:

1. Make sure that physical activity and sedentary behaviour policies are realistic and consistent with overall workplace goals and strategies. The development of policies and ideas should be discussed with workers, and these should be communicated frequently with all employees.

2. Make sure that any physical activity or sedentary behaviour policy encourages and supports everyone at work to change their behaviour using a range of opportunities and resources that will depend on what is available locally. These messages will need to be repeated at work, and encouragement given to all at work in order to refresh motivation for change.

In relation to increasing physical activity; IT IS GOOD PRACTICE TO:

3. Encourage everyone at work to be more physically active where possible, and where opportunities exist, whilst carrying out their daily duties. Employees should be encouraged to set goals and monitor these themselves.⁴

4. Encourage everyone at work to take exercise during their natural work breaks and support employees in considering how best to facilitate this; examples could be the introduction of a walking lunch break or organised group exercise session. This has to take into account what will be practical locally.

5. Encourage everyone at work to use stairs rather than lifts. Written encouragement should be used (for example posters).

6. Offer flexible working practices to encourage physical activity at work.

7. Encourage and support increased physical activity whilst travelling to and from work. This could include cycle purchase schemes and maintenance support e.g. 'bike doctor schemes', and providing workers with showering & changing facilities.

8. Introduce incentive schemes(e.g. Gym Vouchers) to encourage everyone at work to be more physically active⁵.

⁴ There is also increasing interest in individual practical exercise programmes that can reduce musculoskeletal complaints (e.g. strengthening the muscles of the neck, shoulders and arms) (www.jobogkrop.dk).

⁵ For example, this might include discount on bicycle purchases, or discounted local sports facilities and clubs.

9. Make sure that any physical exercise policies that lead to changes in practice are easy to identify. Audit may be one way of evaluating whether your approach has worked.

10. Make sure that everyone at work has the opportunity to increase physical exercise.

11. Provide everyone at work with information, including written information, concerning support, resources and local opportunities for increasing physical exercise⁶.

12. Provide everyone at work with information, including written information, to help them plan their physical activity.

13. Allow everyone at work to give feedback on the nature and use of exercise facilities.

In relation to reducing sedentary behaviour at work; IT IS GOOD PRACTICE TO:

14. Encourage everyone at work to find other ways of building in more physical exercise into daily tasks. For example, placing bins away from desks, standing up when on phone, standing meetings, walking meetings etc..

15. Provide everyone at work with information, including written information, concerning support, resources and local opportunities for reversing sedentary behaviour at work.

16. Allow everyone at work to give feedback on the nature and use of interventions designed to reverse sedentary behaviour.

⁶ This could include walk and cycling routes, local gym facilities etc...

References

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