

## Physical activity factsheet

### Why promote physical activity?

Physical inactivity is recognised as a major risk factor for chronic disease, including heart disease, type 2 diabetes and some cancers. The *Physical Activity Guidelines* recommend that Australian adults aim for 30 minutes of moderate-intensity physical activity on most (if not all) days of the week. The majority of Australians do not meet this recommendation and the workplace has been identified as an important setting to promote and encourage physical activity.

### The effects of physical inactivity

Physical inactivity is one of the biggest global health issues and:

- » Is the fourth leading risk factor for preventable death, worldwide<sup>1</sup>
- » Causes around 30% of heart disease<sup>1</sup>
- » Causes around 27% of diabetes<sup>1</sup>
- » Causes around 21 – 25% of breast and colon cancer<sup>1</sup>
- » Increases the risk of stroke, high blood pressure, obesity, depression, anxiety and falls<sup>2,3</sup>
- » Contributes to over 13 000 premature deaths in Australia every year<sup>4</sup>

The benefits of physical activity in reducing the risk of chronic disease are striking. In the workplace, physical activity is also important in reducing the loss of productivity that occurs when employees come to work but are not fully effective because of illness or injury. It is estimated that this costs workplaces almost \$26 billion per year, four times the cost of staff not attending work.<sup>5</sup> Depression, hypertension and type two diabetes, three of the largest causes of staff not performing well at work because of illness, all respond well to regular physical activity.<sup>5</sup>

### What can we do about it?

Employers need to support workers to be physically active on a regular basis. This can be done in many ways and doesn't have to be costly or time consuming, for example:

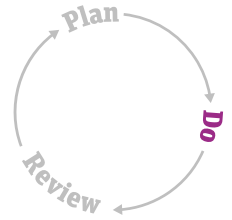
- » Gain management support for flexible working hours so that staff can be active before, during and after work
- » Display posters and brochures, like those produced by the *LiveLighter* program, to inform staff of the benefits of physical activity and to encourage them to do at least 30 minutes of exercise all (or most) days of the week
- » Support and sponsor workplace teams to participate in local fun runs and fitness events
- » Develop a free *TravelSmart* active travel plan to help your workforce utilise walking, cycling and public transport
- » Implement a workplace healthy lifestyle challenge, like Diabetes WA's *Get on Track Challenge*

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- » Organise exercise professionals to deliver exercise education sessions or classes in or around the workplace
- » Promote events such as *Bike Week* in March or *Run for a Reason* in May
- » Encourage workers to participate in events such as *Walk Over October*
- » Organise walking groups, such as the free *Heart Foundation Walking Program*

#### References:

1. World Health Organisation. 2009. Global health risks: mortality and burden of disease attributable to selected major risks. Geneva. WHO.
2. World Health Organization. 2010. Global Recommendations on Physical Activity for Health. Geneva, WHO.
3. Medibank Private. 2007. The cost of physical inactivity. Melbourne. Medibank Private.
4. Chau, J. 2009. Evidence module: workplace physical activity and nutrition interventions. Sydney Physical Activity Nutrition and Obesity Research Group, University of Sydney.
5. Franco, G. 1999. Ramazzini and workers' health. *Lancet* 354:858–861.

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