

The business case for encouraging walking

Encouraging staff to walk more has benefits for both employers and employees. With the amount of time we spend at work and our increasingly sedentary lives, it is important to integrate physical activity in and around the workplace and during our commutes.

The costs of inactivity

The cost to the economy and businesses

[Low levels of physical activity are leading to poor health and wellbeing, costing UK businesses:](#)

- £8bn per year through productivity loss as a direct result of cardiovascular disease (CVD)
- £29bn per year through sickness absence
- £15.1bn per year through presenteeism

The cost to individuals

Even people exercise frequently are still at risk of the negative impacts of sedentary behaviour on health, [especially through sitting at work](#). [A large study](#) involving over 100,000 U.S. adults found that those who sat for more than six hours a day had up to a 40 percent greater risk of death over the next 15 years than those who sat for less than three hours a day. Most importantly, this effect occurred regardless of whether the participants exercised. The study showed that prolonged sitting cancels out the effects of exercise in otherwise active people, with 2 hours of sitting cancelling out 20 minutes of exercise.

The benefits of activity

Benefits for workplaces

The [British Heart Foundation](#) stress the importance of health at work and state that healthier staff:

- Have better morale, leading to improved staff and management relationship
- Take less time off, resulting in reduce absenteeism costs
- Are less likely to leave, contributing to a better corporate image
- Perform better, leading to improved productivity
- Are more productive, giving better job satisfaction

Benefits for the individual

[According to the NHS](#), there is strong scientific evidence that being physically active can help people lead healthier and happier lives.

[The NHS](#) states that people who exercise regularly have a lower risk of developing many long-term (chronic) conditions, such as heart disease, type 2 diabetes, stroke, and some cancers. [Research shows](#) that physical activity can also boost self-esteem, mood, sleep quality and energy, as well as reducing your risk of stress, depression, dementia and Alzheimer's disease.

There is a long list of medically proven health benefits for people who do regular physical activity, including:

- up to a 35% lower risk of coronary heart disease and stroke
- up to a 50% lower risk of type 2 diabetes
- up to a 30% lower risk of depression

[A five-year study](#) compared people who had an active commute with those whose commute involved sitting down (e.g. in a car). The researchers found that walking as a commute was associated with lower risk of CVD incidence and mortality.

Other benefits include for active commuters include:

- Saving time, as people can commute and exercise at the same time.
- Exposure to daylight helps in setting your body clock for the day while giving yourself a dose of vitamin D.
- Giving your eyes a long-distance workout (a vital antidote to desk-based work).
- Beat the 3.00 pm slump with a lunchtime walk. A brisk walk is a natural energiser; boosting circulation and increasing the oxygen supply to cells in your body, helping you feel more alert and alive.
- Improving your mood – The ability of exercise to boost mood is undisputed. Studies have shown regular, moderate-intensity exercise to be as effective as antidepressants in cases of mild to moderate depression.

The benefits of increasing levels of activity through walking

Walking is a cheap and easy way to boost levels of physical activity at your workplace and increase the health and wellbeing among staff. It is ideal for people of all ages and fitness levels who want to be more active.

Workplace walking can also enable people to socialise and connect away from the office environment. This can help improve relationships among staff and increase engagement within the workplace.

Encouraging workers to contribute to the success of workplace walking activities by volunteering as walk leaders can build leadership skills and increase engagement with your organisation. These skills could be acknowledged in personal development reviews and training records.

Increasing the number of people that walk to work can also reduce the number of staff commuting alone by car to your site, helping to relieve pressure on your car parking capacity.

With more people walking in your company, and by offering support for them, you can demonstrate your business' commitment to sustainability and the health and well-being of your staff. This will strengthen your Corporate Social Responsibility status and can contribute to your ISO 14000 standards.

Please see our ['Promoting walking' toolkit](#) for ideas on how to encourage walking in your workplace.

Further information and support

Want to encourage smarter travel to work at your organisation? Businesses in Exeter, Barnstaple and Newton Abbot are eligible for free business support to start travel planning, including support offers for individual members of staff. Email traveldevon@devon.gov.uk to find out more.

[Active Devon](#) is a community-focused, non-profit organisation dedicated to inspiring and supporting people in Devon to be active. They can help you get your workplace more active and support you with behaviour change campaigns, workplace challenges, programme management, design, consultancy and more. Please contact Active Devon via 01392 925 150 or hello@activedevon.org.

Please note: When following our toolkits, please also refer to the [government guidance for safer travel](#).

This page was last updated November 2020.

URLs

- British Heart Foundation – Information cost of inactivity to UK economy and businesses and importance of health at work: <https://www.bhf.org.uk/information-support/publications/health-at-work/health-at-work—business-case-infographics>
- Study on negative impacts of sedentary behaviour on health: <https://academic.oup.com/aje/article/172/4/419/85345>

- NHS – health benefits of exercise: <https://www.nhs.uk/live-well/exercise/exercise-health-benefits/>
- Study on benefits of active commutes: <https://www.bmj.com/content/357/bmj.j1456>
- Promoting walking toolkit: <http://td-toolkit.spindogs-dev7.co.uk/promoting-walking/>
- Active Devon website: <https://www.activedevon.org/>

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