

# Promotion of health-enhancing physical activity in small- to medium-sized enterprises





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# Abstract

Promoting physical activity in the workplace provides substantial health and well-being benefits, as well as enhancing productivity and job satisfaction. Establishing and implementing physical activity programs within Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) is often challenging due to the diverse needs and limitations in specific workplace contexts. This publication highlights the importance of promoting physical activity in the workplace and aims to provide evidence-based, practical and context-specific guidance and tools for SMEs to design and implement effective workplace physical activity programs, which will contribute in developing a culture of health that encourage both physical and mental well-being among all employees.

# Keywords

WORKPLACE  
EXERCISE  
SEDENTARY BEHAVIOR  
PUBLIC HEALTH  
HEALTH PROMOTION

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# Abbreviations

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**SMEs** small- and medium-sized enterprises

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**HEPA** health-enhancing physical activity

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# Executive summary

In alignment with our newly launched Special Initiative on Non-Communicable Diseases and Innovation, this publication serves as a comprehensive resource for small- and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) to promote health-enhancing physical activity within their work environments. The document supports the Special Initiative on Non-Communicable Diseases and Innovation's broader strategic vision of building a non-communicable disease-resilient Europe by 2050.

The publication offers a foundational guide for crafting multi-faceted, context-specific physical activity initiatives tailored to individual SMEs. It first provides the results of a review which identified 64 real-world initiatives designed to bolster workplace physical activity. Organized into 12 primary areas and 20 sub-categories, this menu of initiatives offers SMEs a curated selection of proven strategies to adopt, catering to the diverse needs and capabilities of their workforce. The document focuses on initiatives that are particularly feasible for the unique contexts within SMEs. These initiatives cover a broad spectrum, addressing not only individual adjustments but also complex organizational factors integral to workplace wellness.

By adopting this document, SMEs not only contribute to a healthier and more productive workplace but also advance the larger goals of the Special Initiative on Non-Communicable Diseases and Innovation vision, aiding in the construction of a non-communicable disease-resilient Europe.





# Introduction

The benefits of promoting physical activity in workplaces for health, social relationships and productivity are well known and have been described elsewhere (1). Briefly, participating in physical activity initiatives can improve employees' sense of well-being and their health, reduce their stress and improve their job satisfaction. For employer organizations, workplace physical activity initiatives can reduce staff turnover and absenteeism, increase productivity, provide a caring image and improve staff morale, among others (1).

Evidence from systematic reviews indicates which workplace physical activity initiatives might be effective and the effect of those initiatives. In some studies, however, the context of the workplace is not taken into account as suggested by the social-ecological model (2). Therefore, broad uptake of physical activity initiatives in specific workplace contexts, such as small- and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), might be limited.

In European workplaces, insufficient scaling-up is a key issue, as SMEs represent 99% of all businesses in the European Union; however, SMEs experience difficulty in implementing physical activity initiatives (3). Employees in the European Union face risks not only to their physical health, but 45% of employees have also faced risks to their mental well-being at work (4).

The challenges to implementing health promotion initiatives in SMEs, including physical activity initiatives, include: (i) employees' perception that there are no suitable, simple initiatives available for their specific working circumstances or health needs (5); (ii) employees' perception that significant effort is necessary to implement such initiatives (5); (iii) lack of resources to initiate such initiatives (6); and (iv) lack of understanding of how to implement them (6).

This publication provides SMEs with descriptions of physical activity initiatives that are being applied in practice and information for planning physical activity initiatives that are context-specific, including financial resources and initial investment. Planning for physical activity in SMEs has been linked to better knowledge and awareness of opportunities and resources for physical activity, which may increase the number of choices, contributing to greater flexibility (7).

As there is no one-size-fits all solution and workplace physical activity initiatives must be tailored to the situation of each SME, a menu of choices based on real-life implementation of workplace feasible, effective physical activity initiatives is identified and summarized below.

# Methods

Real-life workplace physical activity initiatives were identified in a scoping review of grey literature (2015 to November 2020), including a systematic search in the Google advanced search platform, in six languages (Catalan, Dutch, English, Finnish, French and Spanish). A total of 713 real-life workplace physical activity initiatives were identified, and a detailed description of the method and the full database of workplace physical activity initiatives has been published (8).

From the initial database, each workplace physical activity initiative was categorized into 12 main areas and 20 sub-areas to better understand the real-life physical activity initiatives that could be implemented in SMEs.

## Main areas:

 <b>ACTIVE WORK</b>	 <b>ACTIVE TRAVEL</b>	 <b>ACTIVE LIVING</b>	 <b>EXERCISE PROGRAMMING</b>
 <b>EXERCISE TRAINING</b>	 <b>HEALTH-CARE SERVICES</b>	 <b>INDIVIDUAL MANAGEMENT AND LEADERSHIP</b>	 <b>ORGANIZATIONAL MANAGEMENT AND LEADERSHIP</b>
 <b>COMMUNICATION</b>	 <b>DISSEMINATION</b>	 <b>SUPPLIES</b>	 <b>PREMISES</b>

**Sub-areas:**

<b>REFORMING WORK</b>	<b>COMMUTING TO WORK</b>	<b>LEISURE-TIME ACTIVITIES</b>	<b>LONG-TERM COUNSELLING</b>
<b>COACHING INTERVENTIONS</b>	<b>MEASUREMENT</b>	<b>TRAINING SESSIONS AND ACTIVITIES</b>	<b>PHYSIOTHERAPY</b>
<b>ASSESSMENTS</b>	<b>BONUS SYSTEMS</b>	<b>ENCOURAGEMENT OF A WORK CULTURE AND ATMOSPHERE</b>	<b>DOCUMENTATION</b>
<b>EVALUATION AND CHECKING</b>	<b>HEALTH CARE</b>	<b>EDUCATION</b>	<b>REFLECTION</b>
<b>INFORMATION</b>	<b>EQUIPMENT</b>	<b>ROOMS</b>	<b>VENUES</b>

Secondly, a Delphi survey was conducted to identify the workplace physical activity initiatives perceived as most feasible for implementation in the context of SMEs. To obtain information on feasibility, a web-based questionnaire was sent to volunteer experts, who were asked to rate the following positive attitudes for each physical activity initiative (9): effectiveness, practicality/viability/feasibility, adaptability, generalizability and cost-benefit. Each of the five attributes of feasibility was scored on a 5-point Likert scale, resulting in a maximum score of 25. A total of 17 experts participated (13 from the Health-Enhancing Physical Activity (HEPA) Europe Network Worksite HEPA Promotion Working Group and 4 HEPA focal points), and 11 countries were represented (Cyprus, Denmark, England, France, Jamaica, Netherlands [Kingdom of the], Portugal, Scotland, Spain, Sweden and Switzerland). A total of 390 physical activity initiatives were evaluated. While 70 initiatives (17.0%) were considered not feasible for SMEs, 43 received a score of  $\geq 20$  out of 25 in terms of feasibility. A detailed description of the Delphi survey method and the results (i.e. the full list of the most feasible physical activity initiatives for implementation in SMEs) will be published shortly.

# Workplace initiatives to promote HEPA

## Workplace HEPA initiatives related to active work, active travel and active living

Eleven HEPA initiatives were identified in the areas of active work, active travel, and active living (Table 1).

Initiatives in the active work area included versatility and switching of work stations and postures, including ergonomics and flexible work schedules. Recycling of duties, flexible work schedules, work-station accessories such as sit-stand desks, the use of stairs, and “walk-and-talk” meetings were mentioned. Initiatives in the active travel area comprised commuting to work, which included initiatives to increase walking and use of bicycles for commuting to work and walking and cycling campaigns. Initiatives in the active living area included activity challenge campaigns and sports events, challenges and competitions for activity time outside working hours.

**Table 1. Description of workplace HEPA initiatives related to active work, active travel and active living**

### Main area

#### ACTIVE WORK



Sub-area	HEPA initiative	Description
Reforming the work	Diversifying and switching working postures and tasks	Promote physical activity breaks during the workday (e.g. standing and screen breaks, stretching, aerobic exercises, short walks).
	Flexible work schedules	Flexible work schedules to allow physical activity (longer lunch breaks, walk or cycle to work, exercise programmes).
	Work-station accessories	High or height-adjustable chair, seated foot rests, standing foot rests, sit-stand desks, anti-fatigue mats
	Sit-stand desks	To reduce sitting and increase exercise to improve both health and safety

Table 1 contd.

**ACTIVE TRAVEL**



**ACTIVE LIVING**



	Use of stairs	Promote use of stairs instead of lifts or escalators through communication (e.g. flyers, posters, e-mails and screen savers), points of decision, campaigns or music in stairwells
	Walking meetings	Have staff meetings in which a set length of time is devoted to physical activity such as walking or “walk-and-talk” meetings
Commuting to work	Walking campaigns	Provide a map of walking routes in newsletters, Intranet, bulletin boards or other method used for communication; run walking campaigns; and create access to and promote safe places for employees and others to walk. In addition, modify the dress code to include comfortable walking shoes.
	Cycling campaigns	Promote cycling to work, and propose events days. Organize a no-parking day for those within cycling distance, or provide bicycle facilities (e.g. rack and parking) to encourage active transport
Leisure-time activities	Sports events	Promote all kinds of sports and family activities oriented towards the health and well-being of employees and their families
	Challenge campaigns	Encourage teams in a challenge (e.g. climb stairs, Fitbit or pedometer challenges, and cycling kilometres)
	Competitions	Encourage teams to participate in competitions, such as an 8-week weight loss competition, cycling to, from and at work, competitions with other companies or organizations; support company sports clubs

## Workplace HEPA initiatives related to exercise programming, exercise training and health-care services

In these three areas, 26 HEPA initiatives were identified (Table 2).

Initiatives in the Exercise Programmes area consisted of counselling, coaching and measurements before and after programmes. Initiatives in the Exercise training area were various sessions and activities, such as cardiovascular endurance, strength, balance, flexibility and mental exercises, as well as games and boot camps. Initiatives in the Health-care services area included various professional health-care services, such as physiotherapy and health assessments.

Table 2. Description of workplace HEPA initiatives related to exercise programming, exercise training and health-care services

Main area

**EXERCISE PROGRAMMING**



Sub-area	HEPA initiative	Description
Long-term counselling	Wellness counsellor	Health and wellness educational seminars featuring topics such as smoking cessation, nutrition and exercise, and disease prevention
	Physical activity and nutrition guidance	Inform employees about the recommended amount of weekly physical activity, and promote the benefits of being active through, e.g. seminars, newsletters and webinars
	Weight management services and groups	Offer employees weight control visits with doctors, and organize talks or physical activity support and suggestions for weight management
Coaching interventions	Personal trainer services	Organize sessions or a guest speaker, consultation with accredited personal trainers or exercise professionals. Offer exercise sessions under the supervision of a personal trainer.
	Physical activity coordinator	Encourage workers to become involved in physical activity in the workplace (exercise programmes coordinator)
	Support physical activity interventions planning	Plan physical activity interventions (e.g. strength exercise programmes, aerobics) or activities to promote physical activity
Measurements	Blood values	Offer opportunities for blood tests
	Blood pressure	Offer the possibility for measuring blood pressure (blood pressure monitors available on site)
	Body composition analysis	Encourage workers to have their body composition analysed to understand their general health status
	Fitness tests	Measure the fitness of participants over time

Table 2 contd.

**EXERCISE TRAINING**



Training sessions and activities	Aerobic endurance training	Physical activity programmes or exercises based on aerobic exercises such as umba, dance, skiing and cycling
	Strength training	Physical activity programmes or exercises based on strength training such as arm, core, back and leg strength exercises
	Balance and stretching sessions	Physical activity programmes or exercises for work balance and flexibility (yoga or pilates)
	Mental exercises	Physical activity programme or exercises for mental health (free access to mindfulness apps)
	Meditation	Physical activity programme or exercises based on meditation (If possible, provide access to a meditation room during breaks)
	Relaxation	Physical activity programme or exercises based on relaxation (If possible, provide access to a relaxation room for pilates)
	Games	Create corporate games such as table tennis, badminton, basketball, rugby, volleyball
	Boot camps	Organize on-site boot camps for training in different techniques and exercises for all employees
Physiotherapy / occupational therapy	Health assessments and guidance (physical activity, nutrition, sleep)	Provide access to physiotherapy and mental health talking therapies, smoking cessation and weight management services, physical activity and nutrition recommendations
	Preventive rehabilitation	Programme physiotherapy professional development classes in order to improve health and prevent ill health in employees (exercise and check posture)
	Massage services	Provide on-site or external physiotherapy services (fast-track physiotherapy services).

**HEALTH-CARE SERVICES**



Table 2 contd.

Assessments	Health risks mapping	Provide free health risk assessments (distribute surveys, annual assessments and health risk appraisals and treatment)
	Posture checks	Provide posture checks and advice on easy exercises (manual handling tasks)
	Ergonomic evaluations	Provide ergonomic assessments and exercises to improve the health of workers in their specific tasks
	Stress tests	Wellness programme: offer courses on stress management

## Workplace HEPA initiatives related to management and leadership

Eight HEPA initiatives were identified in the areas Individual and Organizational management and leadership (Table 3).

Initiatives in the Individual area included bonus systems, promoting commitment to physical activity and providing individual behaviour change strategies. Initiatives in the Organizational area included human resources policies and action plans, their evaluation and the instruments used. Inclusion in the Preventive health-care system was considered one of these initiatives.

Table 3. Description of workplace HEPA initiatives related to management and leadership

### Main area

#### INDIVIDUAL



Sub-area	HEPA initiative	Description
Bonus system	Financial and material benefits	Provide financial incentives for achievement of agreed fitness goals (e.g. employees can earn wellness credits which can be used for fitness equipment, weight-loss programmes, counselling).
	Fitness centre membership	Provide financial incentives for achievement of agreed fitness goals (finance a fitness centre membership).
	Gym passes or vouchers	Provide financial incentives for achievement of agreed fitness goals (free access to sports centres).



Table 3 contd.

**ORGANIZATIONAL**



Encouragement of work culture and atmosphere	Support for individual behaviour change strategies	Identification of employees' motivations to be physiologically active.
Documentation	Inclusion of physical activity and workers' well-being in values	Collect information on values, attitudes, preferences and obstacles to design a programme and evaluation tool to measure its success.
	Physical activity in human resources policies and in organizational action plans	Policies and operational plans to encourage employees to be more physically active (walk, cycle or use other modes of transport involving physical activity, flexible work policies and incentive schemes)
Evaluation and checking	Systematic assessment and evaluation and instruments	Use of key performance Indicators of physical activity in the organization
Health care	Preventive health-care system	Preventive monitoring, in-house medical service, periodic medical examinations and health-care consultations

## Workplace HEPA initiatives related to communication and dissemination

Eleven HEPA initiatives were identified in the areas Communication and Dissemination (Table 4).

Initiatives in the Communication area included conferences, seminars and lectures to educate employees, exhibitions, information desks and workshops. Initiatives in the Dissemination area included various dissemination materials and channels to inform workers.

Table 4. Description of workplace HEPA initiatives related to communication and dissemination

**COMMUNICATION**



Sub-area	HEPA initiative	Description
Education	Conferences	Organize conferences about physical activity and health benefits.
	Seminars	Organize talks and seminars about becoming more physically active.
	Lectures	Wellness programmes with lectures

Table 4 contd.

**DISSEMINATION**



Reflection	Discussions with sports and health professionals	Well-being as a topic for discussion in regional forums and meetings led by physical activity professionals
	Workshops	Organize workshops on physical activity and health benefits.
Information	Information	Provide information on physical activity.
	Exhibitions	Provide educational and awareness strategies via exhibitions.
	Information desk	Identify a place in the organization where employees can find information on physical activity.
	Leaflets, information material	Information on events distributed in factsheets, education sessions, posters and newsletters
	Social media	Provide information about physical activity and health benefits via social networks or online tools.
	Internal information channels, e.g. Internet pages, television	Provide information about the benefits of activity and regular movement in internal channels (e-mail, newsletter, Internet pages, television).

## Workplace HEPA initiatives related to supplies and premises

Twelve HEPA initiatives were identified in the areas Supplies and Premises (Table 5).

Initiatives in the Supplies area included storage and equipment. Initiatives in the Premises area included the supply and subsidization of sports equipment, provision of sports facilities and dressing and washing rooms.

Table 5. Description of workplace HEPA initiatives related to supplies and premises

**Main area**

**SUPPLIES**



Sub-area	HEPA initiative	Description
Equipment	Various sports equipment to be tested and used	Provide a sufficient supply of equipment for fitness and sports.
	Subsidized purchases	Provide a financial subsidy for fitness classes, sports training or equipment.

Table 5 contd.

**PREMISES**



Rooms	Dressing rooms	Provide dressing rooms or rooms for workers to dress and shower.
	Repositories for sports equipment	Provide wellness rooms with exercise equipment for staff to use during breaks.
	Storage for bicycles	Offer space to store bicycles (parking, bicycle racks and storage rooms).
Venues	Areas	Provide areas around or in the workplace that employees can use.
	Courts	Offer space to practise sports, such as a court to play basketball, football or hockey or to practise other activities or events.
	Grounds	Provide grounds around or in the workplace that employees can use.
	Gyms	Provide a gym at work where employees can work out.
	Fields	Offer fields that employees can use to participate in various sports.
	Parks	Coordinate with the community (e.g. form partnerships with nearby parks).
	Tracks	Provide off-site exercise facilities (trail or track for walking, jogging or cycling).

# Feasible, real-life initiatives for HEPA in SMEs

The HEPA initiatives considered to be feasible for implementation in SMEs were identified for all the main areas and sub-areas of workplace physical activity initiatives.

Those in “Active work, active travel and active living” included walking meetings, provision of support such as apps or computer programs that give notifications after a certain time and suggest a stretch exercise, fitness balls to sit on to improve posture and core strength, and a flexible work schedule. Active travel initiatives included all kinds of cycling and walking campaigns. Feasible workplace HEPA initiatives in “active living” included promoting the use of stairs and related campaigns, challenges and competitions (e.g. step count competitions).

The largest number of feasible initiatives were those for “Exercise programming, exercise training and health-care services”, such as provision of wellness and physical activity counsellors or coordinators, training sessions (walking programmes, stretching sessions, physical activity classes, warm-up exercises) and providing fast-track physiotherapy.

Under “Management and leadership”, effective HEPA initiatives for SMEs included provision of some kind of bonus system, such as gym passes or vouchers or sponsorship for participating in an event. Policy and action plans for physical activity and individual behavioural change techniques were also identified as feasible tools for SMEs.

Feasible HEPA initiatives for SMEs in “Communication and dissemination” included use of leaflets and materials providing information on safe walking routes to and from the workplace. Under “Communication”, discussion with sports and health professionals was a highlight.

Feasible HEPA initiatives for SMEs under “Supplies and Premises” included parking for bicycles, so that employees know that they are kept safe while they work. Other ways in which workplaces can foster on-site physical activity included a fully equipped workout facility and space for easily transportable equipment and fitness classes. An overview of HEPA initiatives identified as feasible for SMEs is shown in Fig. 1.

**Fig. 1. Overview of the real-life initiatives perceived to be feasible to promote physical activity in SMEs**





## **Top 10 initiatives perceived as most feasible for HEPA in SMEs**

## INITIATIVE 1



### Title:

## CYCLING CAMPAIGN

**Description:** Cycling to work as a healthy, economical means of transport that is also environmentally friendly.

**Main area:** Active travel.

**Sub-area:** Commuting to work.

**Objectives:** To encourage cycling to work and leaving cars behind.

### Activities:

- Competition between workplaces on the number of employees who bicycle to work.

### League competitions:

- Competition on the number of kilometres covered overall by the teams within the workplace league.
- Competition on the ratio of kilometres covered to the number of people in each team within the workplace league.

### Related initiatives:

- Bike club: create a bike club in the enterprise to promote active travel.
- Supply bicycles: provide bicycles so that all workers can use active transport.
- Bicycle parking: provide a bicycle rack for secure parking of employees' bicycles to make it easier for employees to commute to and from work by bicycle or to take bicycle breaks during work.
- Financial incentives to promote active travel: parking cash-out, free guaranteed ride home programme.
- Dress code: permit a more relaxed dress code on specified biking days.

Iceland Monitor. Biking to work for twenty years. Iceland Monitor. 2022 May 04. Available from: [https://icelandmonitor.mbl.is/news/culture\\_and\\_living/2022/05/04/biking\\_to\\_work\\_for\\_twenty\\_years/](https://icelandmonitor.mbl.is/news/culture_and_living/2022/05/04/biking_to_work_for_twenty_years/)



## INITIATIVE 2

**Title:**

### ACTIVE MEETINGS

**Description:** Organization of staff meetings that include time devoted to physical activity such as walking or stretching.

**Main area:** Active work.

**Sub-area:** Reforming work.

**Objectives:** To encourage employers to increase their physical activity throughout the work meetings.

**Activities:**

- Stretching: during meetings and at times when stretching exercises can be incorporated.
- Walking around the premises during meetings: providing and identifying walking paths or other areas around or in the workplace that employees can use.

**Related initiatives:**

- Facilities: on-site opportunities and facilities (create spaces with workout equipment).
- Outdoor physical activity spaces: accessible, appealing walking routes or “trails”.
- Walking groups or teams: lunchtime walking groups, competitions that encourage and motivate employees to meet individual or team goals.
- Policies: parking about 1.6 km (1 mile) away, walking to external meetings, “walk-and-talk meetings”, walking access to public transit, planning to make the communities around workplaces more walkable.
- Wearables fitness trackers: pedometer or Fitbit challenges (daily walking diary for steps or kilometres).

Cobb and Douglas Public Health. WorkHealthyGA Toolkit. Atlanta, GA: Cobb and Douglas Public Health; 2017 Aug 29. Available from: [https://www.cobbanddouglaspublichealth.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/08/DPH\\_WorkHealthyGA\\_Toolkit\\_4Web\\_062917.pdf](https://www.cobbanddouglaspublichealth.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/08/DPH_WorkHealthyGA_Toolkit_4Web_062917.pdf)





## INITIATIVE 3

**Title:**

### INFORMATION PACK

**Description:** Development of an information pack, including a map of safe walking routes to and from the workplace.

**Main area:** Dissemination.

**Sub-area:** Information.

**Objectives:** To provide an information pack to promote active travel via newsletters, Intranet, bulletin boards or other communication method.

**Activities:**

- Develop an information pack, including a map of safe walking routes to and from the workplace, with estimated walking times, distances and duration (people often miscalculate walking duration to specific locations) to local facilities such as shops and bus stops.

**Material for the information pack:**

- testimonials from employees who routinely walk to work; and
- “walk to work tips”, such as leaving work shoes at the workplace and wearing running shoes for walking.

**Related initiatives:**

- newsletter, web portal or mobile app to provide information about health, nutrition and exercise;
- talks or workshops: counselling sessions with a dietitian, fitness specialist or behavioural coach; and
- providing information on the benefits of health promotion and physical activity through materials, literature, fact sheets, posters and videos.

Exercise is Medicine Australia. EIM Workplace PA Guide. Burwood East, VIC: Exercise is Medicine Australia; 2018 May. Available from: [http://exerciseismedicine.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/EIM\\_Workplace\\_PA\\_Guide.pdf](http://exerciseismedicine.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/EIM_Workplace_PA_Guide.pdf)

## INITIATIVE 4



**Title:**

### WALKING CAMPAIGN

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**Description:** Encouragement of employees to walk to work.

**Main area:** Active travel.

**Sub-area:** Commuting to work.

**Objectives:** To encourage employees to walk to work, which also promotes the wider benefits of energy efficiency and reduced transport costs.

**Activities:**

- Encourage employees to engage in short bouts of moderate intensity walking on most working days. In medium-sized towns, this activity encourages employees to walk to work. Indicated for companies that are close to towns that can be reached on foot in 20–30 min.

**Related initiatives:**

- Dress code: encourage employees to keep walking shoes at their desks, or modify the dress code to include comfortable walking shoes.
- Policies: no parking provided for those within walking distance; audit of safe walking to and around work; engage in community planning to make the communities around workplaces more walkable.

Institution of Occupational Safety and Health (IOSH). Working well: Guidance on promoting health and wellbeing at work. Leicester, UK: IOSH; 2018 Mar. Available from: <https://iosh.com/media/3685/ps0355-working-well-guide-new.pdf>



## INITIATIVE 5

**Title:**

# REHABILITATION

**Description:** Referral to fast-track physiotherapy service by line manager.

**Main area:** Health-care services.

**Sub-area:** Physiotherapy.

**Objectives:** To offer a dedicated fast-track physiotherapy service for staff who report a musculoskeletal health issue.

**Activities:**

- Physiotherapy service at the workplace to improve the health of employees.
- The line manager refers staff and is therefore involved and understands health issues and their impact at work in order to support staff by making adjustments. Staff with musculoskeletal issues that prevent them from working have access to physiotherapy services.

**Related initiatives:**

- Physical activity programme: exercise programme, which includes talks on prevention and stretching programmes, posture training (e.g. sitting and moving regularly) and follow-up advice with recommended exercises.
- Musculoskeletal health workshops (including lower back, upper back, neck, shoulder, and knee) and site visits by a physiotherapist and occupational health experts and assessment of employees' work stations.
- Well-being portal and app.
- Discounted physiotherapy scheme.
- On-site and external physiotherapy.

Business in the Community (BITC). Musculoskeletal health in the workplace: A wellbeing toolkit for employers. London, UK: BITC; 2017 Mar. Available from: <https://www.bitc.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/bitc-wellbeing-toolkit-musculoskeletal-mar2017.pdf>



## INITIATIVE 6

**Title:**

### WARM-UP EXERCISES

**Description:** A 15-min warm up each day with subsequent adoption of appropriate postures.

**Main area:** Exercise training.

**Sub-area:** Musculoskeletal health.

**Objective:** To help enterprises to take care of their employees' musculoskeletal health.

**Activities:**

- 15-min warm-up exercises: develop a training programme including a 15-min warm up each day with subsequent adoption of appropriate workplace postures.
- Free mobile application "15-min coach", exercise and a facility app that enables individuals to monitor their pain levels regularly.

**Related initiatives:**

- Fitness programmes at the workplace: exercise professionals visit and teach easy-to-do exercises for the back and neck in small teams, training courses for employees;
- Booster breaks: increase movement time and reduce sedentary periods (warm-up sessions that include aerobic exercises, stretching and toning and flexibility exercises);
- manual handling tasks that include posture controls (videos, wellness portal and app).

Business in the Community (BITC). Musculoskeletal health in the workplace: A wellbeing toolkit for employers. London, UK: BITC; 2017 Mar. Available from: <https://www.bitc.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/bitc-wellbeing-toolkit-musculoskeletal-mar2017.pdf>



## INITIATIVE 7

**Title:**

# SUPPORT FOR INDIVIDUAL BEHAVIOUR CHANGE STRATEGIES

**Description:** Health check and one-on-one dialogue with a psychologist to empower, reflect and act on one's well-being.

**Main area:** Communication.

**Sub-area:** Dialogue.

**Objectives:** To empower each employee to act on their own well-being, including life values, work-life balance, job satisfaction, lifestyle and health.

**Activities:**

- Each employee is offered a health check and a one-on-one dialogue with a psychologist, followed by a 2-day workshop in groups of 15–20 colleagues.

**Related initiatives:**

- Share lessons learnt with other companies and institutions, and offer mentoring.
- Web-based portal: “ask the doctor” function on health, nutrition and exercise.
- Group lessons to provide social support .
- Offer information, feedback and education: organize talks and seminars on becoming more physically active and understand the benefits for health.

Global Healthy Workplace Alliance. Healthy Workplaces: A Selection of Global Good Practices. Global Healthy Workplace Alliance; 2018 Feb 27. Available from: <http://www.globalhealthyworkplace.org/documents/Healthy-Workplaces-Good-Practices.pdf>



## INITIATIVE 8

**Title:**

### USE OF STAIRS

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**Description:** Prompts to encourage the use of stairs.

**Main area:** Active work.

**Sub-area:** Reforming work.

**Objectives:** To improve the amount of physical activity at the workplace by promoting use of stairs.

**Activity:**

- Display “point-of-decision” prompts to encourage people to use stairs instead of a lift (particularly posters).

**Related initiatives:**

- Prompts in and near stairwells or on lifts and escalators to encourage individuals to use stairs (e.g. music in stairwells, fun sayings and facts).
- Communication methods: posters, flyers, e-mails, screen savers, paint, artwork.
- Organize a “No lift day” on 1 day a week.
- Make stairwells pleasant.

Cavill Associates Ltd in collaboration with the University of Salford. Best Practice in Promoting Employee Health and Wellbeing in the City of London. London, UK: City of London Corporation; 2014 Mar. Available from: <https://www.birmingham.ac.uk/Documents/research/ias/employee-health-and-wellbeing-in-the-city-of-London-final.pdf>



## INITIATIVE 9

### Title:

# ACTION PLANS AND INCENTIVES.

**Description:** workplace policies and incentives to encourage physical activity at work.

**Main area:** Individual management and leadership.

**Sub-area:** Encouragement of a work culture and atmosphere.

**Objective:** To develop policies, action plans and incentives to encourage physical activity at work, such as flexible time, paid activity breaks or discounts for offsite exercise facilities.

### Activities:

#### Simple activities that take little time to prepare or plan for:

- Active announcements: While announcements are made during working time, the employees can do easy stretches and slow activities. Demonstrate the activities yourself or by an assistant, changing activities every 15–30 seconds. Examples include walking in place, stretching both arms up and down, stepping from side to side, pressing the arms forward then the elbows back, rolling the shoulders forwards and backwards, rolling the head in a half circle left and right.
- Stretches and exercises during working time: chair exercises, stretches, tai chi and yoga exercises. Stretching can be encouraged in part or all of a physical activity break, according to the employees' needs and preferences.
- Energizers: resources and video of group activities to promote social interaction and physical activity at work.

#### Medium-level activities that take more time to prepare or plan for:

- Music activity videos: employees can follow the movements shown on a website video (e.g. bachata, cha cha).
- Office workouts: website exercise videos and resources that demonstrate physical activities that can be done in an office or in a meeting space (e.g. office workouts).

#### More complex activities that take more time to prepare or plan for:

- Move to music: Employees create their own movements to a song, and demonstrate the movements to other employees. Use simple movements and vary them every 10–30 s. Call out the movements as the song progresses. You could also list the movements on a slide for reference. Many songs and music videos can be found on youtube.com or on royalty-free music websites.
- Pantomimes: Pantomimes are a specific type of entertainment in which people make elaborate gestures without words to express themselves. The point of a pantomime break is to encourage physical movement in a creative, imaginative activity. Select topics that keep everyone moving as participants rather than as observers (e.g. favourite activities and sports, active spelling, story time).

### Related initiatives:

- Provide access to exercise facilities (shower facilities) at work.
- Policies: flexible times for beginning and ending a workday, job sharing and telecommuting. Formal or informal written statements designed to protect or promote employee health.

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). Workplace Physical Activity Break Guide 508. Atlanta, GA: CDC; 2021 May. Available from: <https://www.cdc.gov/workplacehealthpromotion/initiatives/resource-center/pdf/Workplace-Physical-Activity-Break-Guide-508.pdf>



## INITIATIVE 10

**Title:**

### COMPETITIONS

**Description:** Encouraging staff to form sports teams (e.g. netball, volleyball, football, basketball) and to compete against teams in other workplaces.

**Main area:** Active living.

**Sub-area:** Leisure-time activations.

**Objectives:** To implement initiatives with limited or no resources. In this case, encourage staff to form teams and compete with other teams or against other companies.

**Activities:**

- Organize and encourage corporate teams for events such as tournaments and training in netball, volleyball, football and basketball.

**Related initiatives:**

- Partner with sports clubs or establish a company sports team.
- Sports programmes and events: training in sports, promotion of all kinds of sports and family activities.

Ministry of Health and Wellness, Jamaica. Physical Activity Guide for the Workplace. Kingston, Jamaica: Ministry of Health and Wellness, Jamaica; 2020 Nov. Available from: [https://www.moh.gov.jm/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/Physical-Activity-Guide-for-the-Workplace\\_compressed.pdf](https://www.moh.gov.jm/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/Physical-Activity-Guide-for-the-Workplace_compressed.pdf)





# Conclusion

This document provides a menu of choices for real-life workplace physical activity initiatives to promote health. Identification of such initiatives provides better understanding of the contexts in which workplace physical activity programmes are implemented, which is important before disseminating best practices for physical activity interventions in SMEs.

The publication provides a state-of-the-art snapshot of current physical activity initiatives in workplaces as a starting point for identifying feasible practices in the context of SMEs. Although best practices for occupational physical activity interventions should be based on application of the principles of programme design, evaluation and multicomponent system approaches, use of this document might be a cost-effective step before embarking on more extensive stakeholder engagement for developing practical guidelines to promote physical activity in SMEs. Future work will include assessment of the effects of these real-life practices on workplace physical activity and making them effective and scalable for broader use in SMEs.

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## The WHO Regional Office for Europe

The World Health Organization (WHO) is a specialized agency of the United Nations created in 1948 with the primary responsibility for international health matters and public health. The WHO Regional Office for Europe is one of six regional offices throughout the world, each with its own programme geared to the particular health conditions of the countries it serves.



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