



# ***National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence***

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## **PRESS RELEASE**

### **New NICE public health guidance on promoting physical activity in the workplace**

The National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence (NICE) has today (28 May 2008) issued guidance for employers on how to encourage employees to increase their levels of physical activity.

People of working age are not active enough to benefit their health; this contributes to sickness absence and decreased productivity. Physical inactivity in England costs an estimated £8.2 billion each year - this includes the direct costs of treating diseases linked to lack of activity and the indirect costs caused through sickness absence.

Physical activity not only contributes to both physical and mental well being, it is essential for good health. It can help to prevent or manage conditions and diseases including coronary heart disease, diabetes, and some cancers. Obesity can be caused, in part, by too little physical activity - dealing with the consequences of this condition costs a further estimated £2.5 billion each year.

Increasing workplace physical activity is an important opportunity to raise levels of exercise in large sections of the population and will contribute to reducing sickness absence. This guidance on workplace physical activity is aimed at employers in all organisations who have a responsibility or a role in improving health in the workplace. This especially includes staff responsible for human resources or occupational health. The guidance will also be of interest to employees and their representatives.

Recommendations for employers include:

- Develop a plan or policy across the organisation to encourage and support employees to be physically active, then introduce and monitor a programme based on the plan. This could be part of a broader programme to improve health.
- Encourage employees to walk, cycle or use another mode of transport involving physical activity to travel part or all of the way to and from work.
- Help employees to be physically active during the working day. For example providing information about walking or cycling routes or putting up signs to encourage them to use the stairs.

In addition local strategic partnerships, trades unions, business federations and those organisations with a responsibility for increasing physical activity levels or for occupational health should provide support for those employers who want to implement this guidance. Employers could receive information on, or links to, local resources.

**Professor Peter Littlejohns, Executive Lead for the guidance, and Clinical and Public Health Director at NICE said:** “With working people spending an estimated 60% of their waking hours at work, many employers already recognise their responsibility for the health and wellbeing of their employees. As well as benefiting staff, a healthy workforce can result in financial benefits for employers, including increased productivity and less sickness absence as well as greater staff retention.

”This new advice forms part of a growing suite of guidance aimed at promoting health in the workplace. It includes advice for employers on workplace help for staff who want to stop smoking and is supported by existing NICE public health guidance, such as recommendations on physical activity and the environment.”

**Professor Catherine Law, Chair of the Public Health Interventions Advisory Committee (PHIAC) at NICE and Professor of Public Health and Epidemiology, University College London Institute of Child Health said:** “In developing this guidance, the Committee produced recommendations that can be put in practice in ways to suit small businesses or larger organisations. The guidance also highlights the importance of involving employees in developing plans and designing programmes, ensuring that changes are appropriate for the individual organisation.”

**Dr Matt Kearney, PHIAC member at NICE, GP in Runcorn and GP Public Health Practitioner in Knowsley said:** “Physically active employees are less likely to suffer from major health problems, less likely to take sickness leave and less likely to have

an accident at work. These recommendations aim to help employers make it easier for staff to be active, and so contribute towards a healthier workplace. The guidance will help improve employees' activity levels and reduce the time and money lost due to sickness absence. This guidance is good news for employers and employees alike."

**Mr Dale Robinson, PHAC member at NICE and Corporate Manager - Health & Environmental Services at South Cambridgeshire District Council said:**

"Physical inactivity in England is estimated to cost £8.2 billion each year, which includes the indirect costs caused through sickness absence. This guidance is about making sure that people have access to information and resources that will help them to become more physically active during their working day and beyond. These recommendations for the workplace will complement wider strategies to increase physical activity levels and improve people's health."

**Ends**

## **Notes to Editors**

### **About the guidance**

1. The workplace health promotion: how to encourage employees to be physically active guidance is available at: [www.nice.org.uk/PH013](http://www.nice.org.uk/PH013)
2. Currently around 65% of men and 76% of women in England do not achieve the recommended level of activity for health (to accumulate at least 30 minutes of at least moderate intensity physical activity on five or more days of the week). Moderate physical activity is equivalent to brisk walking (approx 5kph).
3. Increasing physical activity levels has numerous benefits - it can help to prevent or manage over 20 conditions and diseases, including coronary heart disease, diabetes, some cancers and obesity. Physical activity can also help to promote mental wellbeing - important given that mental health problems including stress, depression and anxiety resulted in over 10 million working days being lost.
4. To accompany this guidance, NICE has produced a tool enabling organisations to create a business case for promoting workplace physical activity. The tool is available at [www.nice.org.uk/PH013](http://www.nice.org.uk/PH013)
5. Related guidance includes:
  - The physical activity and environment [www.nice.org.uk/PH008](http://www.nice.org.uk/PH008)
  - Workplace health promotion: how to help employees to stop smoking [www.nice.org.uk/PHI005](http://www.nice.org.uk/PHI005)

### **About NICE**

6. The National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence (NICE) is the independent organisation responsible for providing national guidance on the promotion of good health and the prevention and treatment of ill health.
7. NICE produces guidance in three areas of health:

- **public health** – guidance on the promotion of good health and the prevention of ill health for those working in the NHS, local authorities and the wider public and voluntary sector
- **health technologies** – guidance on the use of new and existing medicines, treatments and procedures within the NHS
- **clinical practice** – guidance on the appropriate treatment and care of people with specific diseases and conditions within the NHS.