

The Right Fit: Healthy Work Environment – Small Business Policy Examples

If you work at a small firm (classified as 1-24 employees), there are several no- and low-cost strategies you can integrate into your work environment to address ergonomics and promote physical activity in your employees' daily lives.

Improving Ergonomics - Policy Examples

1. Encourage your employees to practice good posture. Share articles, resources and posters in your office common areas. Remind workers that shifting and movement in your position throughout the day is critical.
2. Remind your employees that change is good! Alternating tasks throughout the day, or job rotations, can be a great way to avoid repetitive movements which cause MSDs and strain. Encourage your employees to integrate rest breaks throughout the day, with messaging in common areas or even a stretch break scheduled into weekly meetings or Company Town Halls.
3. Lift with your knees! If an employee's job function requires manual material handling, even light office duty lifting, be sure to train employees on proper lifting techniques. Posters and information are available free of charge from the www.osha.gov website.
4. Examine your employee workstations and have each employee do an ergonomics audit - there is free, helpful guidance online. Have each employee take 15 minutes at the start of your next Friday meeting, or incorporate this activity into your performance appraisals.
 - a. Ensure each employee's keyboard and mouse are positioned at the same level, with the weight of arms supported by armrests.
 - b. Keyboard and mouse should also be positioned so wrists remain straight.
 - c. If employees are required to look at documents as they type, provide document holders (low-cost, from any office supply store).
 - d. All other required tools, including staplers, pens and pencils, should be within easy reach.
 - e. If the phone or video calls are utilized frequently, invest in headsets for every employee.
5. Chill out - and encourage your employees to do the same. A stressful work environment can cause employees to tense muscles and remain in this tensed state for longer periods of time. Workers who feel pressured to complete tasks, or that they're being measured by their speed of completion rather than the quality, may skip breaks or strain themselves. ¹

¹ "7 Simple Tips for Improving Workplace Ergonomics". Gary Stevenson, November 30, 2018. <https://osg.ca/7-simple-tips-for-improving-workplace-ergonomics/>

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Increasing Physical Activity in the Workplace - Policy Examples

No budget for a treadmill desk? No office with an opportunity for interconnecting stair? Not a problem! There are many ways that all employees, even remote workers, can incorporate physical activity into their workday to improve their work-life balance and physical health. Physical inactivity has been linked as a cause to disease, disability and cancer. Encourage your employees to reduce their total seated time daily through the following strategies:

1. Identify new ways to commute - companies are able to purchase or offer discounted bikeshare memberships, and may even be able to claim them as a tax deduction. Even if employees drive to your office, encourage them to park at the other end of the parking lot. If you work in a building with both stairs and an elevator, educate your employees about the benefits of taking the stairs. Make the activity into a fun competition between studios and groups with the purchase of low-cost pedometers for staff.
2. Look for ways to stand and work - encourage employees to stand or walk while talking on the phone, or walk to a colleague's desk for a face-to-face chat, instead of phone and instant messaging.
3. Encourage employees to take fitness breaks - build time into your meetings for gentle stretching or consider starting one weekly meeting 15 mins later and have employees go for a quick walk before joining.
4. Make time for exercise and consider offering your employees a discount towards gym memberships or dedicated breaks to working out at your office's fitness center. If not feasible, purchase low-cost fitness gear, such as stretching bands or tubes, exercise balls and hand weights to keep in common areas or conference rooms at your office.
5. Make it fun! Organize a lunchtime walking group. Hold each other accountable for regular exercise - and offer encouragement to everyone to participate. If a colleague approaches you with an issue or concern, suggest the discussion occur over a walk instead of seated in a conference room.
6. Consider conducting walking meetings - when practical. Do laps inside your building or take it outdoors when the weather cooperates.
7. If your job already involves walking, (for example - at a jobsite), speed up your walking to maximize benefits.

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8. If your job function requires traveling for work, plan ahead - walk at the airport, choose hotels which provide fitness facilities or offer low-cost equipment that employees can travel with on a check-out policy.²

Improving Air Quality - Policy Examples

If you work at a small firm (classified as 1-24 employees), there are several no- and low-cost strategies you can implement to improve indoor air quality at your office and at home.

1. Implement and encourage policies around not smoking. Secondhand smoke causes lower respiratory tract infections, ear infections, asthma and pneumonia, especially in children.
2. Test for radon at your office and home. A colorless, odorless gas, radon is the second leading cause of lung cancer and testing costs as low as \$20³.
3. Avoid using harmful chemicals in your own home and inquire with building management about the cleaners they use. Switch to natural, harmless alternatives when possible.
4. Use a HEPA filter and subsidize the cost of HEPA filters to employees at their workstations. High-Efficiency Particulate Air (HEPA) Filtration equipment catches smaller particles than a typical air filter. Many also provide protection against common allergens, including pet dander, dust and mold spores. HEPA filters can be installed into existing home furnaces and air conditioning equipment, or used in standalone devices.
5. Green up your office or home office with air purifying plants. Bamboo, palms and ferns are some of the best air purifying plants commercially available and they're all extremely affordable. Assign someone from your office with a green thumb to tend to them, or rotate responsibility.
6. Remove, or reduce, the use of aerosol sprays in your office and home. Products such as hairspray, bug spray, furniture polish and any cleaners in aerosol spray canisters contain propellants which are dispelled into the air when used. These particulates are very fine, and can be breathed in when used. Seek out pump or trigger spray bottles when possible.

² "Office Exercise: Add more activity to your workday", The Mayo Clinic. <https://www.mayoclinic.org/healthy-lifestyle/adult-health/in-depth/office-exercise/art-20047394>

³ At-Home Radon Test Kit. https://www.amazon.com/gp/product/B00002N83E/ref=as_li_ss_tl?ie=UTF8&camp=1789&creative=390957&creativeASIN=B00002N83E&linkCode=as2&tag=wisbre03-20

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7. Improve ventilation - find ways to recirculate with outdoor air and open windows if possible. Use exhaust fans in kitchens and bathrooms. Subsidize the cost of in-home ventilation units if possible for employees.
8. Remain diligent about mold in home and office environments - regularly examine kitchens and bathrooms for leaky pipes, windows and gutters. Any place where moisture regularly collects presents an opportunity for mold.
9. Clean your office and home regularly - encourage employees to keep their desks clean, whether at the office or at home. Regular cleaning, especially dusting and wiping of all surfaces, reduces dust mites, animal dander, pollen and other toxins which can aggravate health conditions that hurt work-life balance.
10. Consider removing your shoes before entering your home (this solution might not carry over so well at the office!) Humans bring in a large number of toxins on the soles of their shoes - including pollen, animal feces and harmful chemicals.⁴

These are just a few of the strategies which can help limit colds, improve asthmatic experiences and safeguard your employees from future illness. For more ideas with costs associated, please consult our Medium Business and Large Business policies pages.

⁴ "10 Cheap Ways to Improve the Air Quality in Your Home", Linsey Knerl, March 18, 2014. <https://www.wisebread.com/10-cheap-ways-to-improve-the-air-quality-in-your-home>