



# Active Employee Toolkit

Tips and tools employers can use to support the health and wellbeing of employees through physical activity

January 2021

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# Welcome

The situation regarding restrictions for sport and activity is changing all the time, so please make sure [you check the latest government guidelines regularly.](#)

We've tried to provide a range of resources in this toolkit but we know not all these ideas will be relevant to every individual, work setting, environment or job role

Sport England is the arms-length body of government responsible for supporting grassroots sport and physical activity in England. We exist to make sure everyone in the country has the chance to move more and experience the physical and mental health benefits of an active life.

We understand this is a hugely challenging time for businesses and organisations and recognise the vital role you play in supporting employee wellbeing.

Our research shows that many people are finding it tough to stay physically active under coronavirus (Covid-19) restrictions, yet there is growing evidence it's more important now than ever for both employee and business health.

Keeping active has been shown to boost mental health, enhance immunity and aid concentration meaning a healthier, happier and more productive workforce with improved morale and better performance.

This toolkit is designed to help you support your employees to stay active over the coming weeks and months. It provides advice, tips and shareable resources so you can enable your teams to build more movement into their working day.

It's primarily aimed at HR professionals and line managers but can be used by anyone looking to promote or experience a more physically active working day.

We hope this guide will help you and your employees to feel like it's possible for everyone to find ways to keep moving.



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## Top 3 ways to make a difference

We've pulled together the top three things you can do above all else if you're short on time but looking for simple ways to get started quickly and have an immediate impact:

- 1** Let your employees know they have your permission and support to be active – communicate through internal comms channels, senior leadership and line managers that you actively encourage this and understand it is important for physical and mental health as people cope with current restrictions
- 2** Offer flexible working hours – allowing staff to flex their hours to build in activity before, after or during the day can make a real difference, especially during the darker winter months when there are fewer daylight hours to get outside
- 3** Share the Top 10 tips on [page 14](#) with your employees – a range of practical advice, ideas and resources to help employees of all activity levels

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## Why an active workforce is desirable

“ There is no point in life where doing more exercise does not improve health in multiple ways.”

Professor Chris Whitty, Chief Medical Officer, 2020

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**Sources:**

(1) CIPD Health and Wellbeing at Work survey, April 2019

(2) The economics of exercise Measuring the business benefit of being physically fit A report for AXA PPP healthcare September 2019

(3) Lee IM, et al. (2012). Effect of physical inactivity on major non-communicable diseases worldwide: an analysis of burden of disease and life expectancy. Lancet 380: 219–29

(4) The Economic Benefits of a More Physically Active Population, Rand Europe 2019.

# The business case for increasing physical activity at work

Physical activity has been shown to reduce stress and anxiety, strengthen the immune system, improve productivity, increase resilience, lower absenteeism and presenteeism rates and enhance teamwork and self-confidence.

Now more than ever, movement and exercise are vital for the health of both employees and businesses and we hope some of the resources in this toolkit will help you support employee wellbeing as you and they deal with the impacts of the pandemic.

For more detail, see: [Physical Activity at Work – The Business Case](#), provided care of Workplace Movement.

## Fast Facts

- Mental ill-health, stress and musculoskeletal problems are the three leading causes of long-term absence and all three are associated with a lack of physical activity (1).
- Studies have shown that physical activity helps mental health in many ways including improved mood, reduced stress, increased self-esteem, prevention/management of depression and anxiety.
- The annual cost to UK business from physically inactive workers is £6.6billion (2).
- Physical inactivity is responsible for one in six premature deaths (3).
- Physically inactive people lose up to four and a half working days per year compared to active people (4).

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# Building an active culture

How to create a working environment that supports and empowers your people to build activity into their working day

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Further guidance for line managers on creating a supportive working environment for active working, see Workplace Movement's [Physical Activity in the Workplace: Line manager guidance](#).

## Five ways to build an active working culture

Creating a work environment that truly encourages and enables activity is a fundamental step to building an active working culture. Here are some simple ways you can make a real difference:

1. **Give permission** – employees are more likely to take time to move if they feel genuinely encouraged to, so let them know you actively support this using some of the resources in this toolkit.
2. **Be a role model** – normalise active working by showing your teams this is something that senior leaders within your organisation genuinely embrace and practise themselves.
3. **Offer flexible working hours** – allowing staff to flex their hours to build in activity before, after or during the day can make a real difference, especially during the darker winter months.
4. **Involve and empower your employees** – ask your people what they want and need through a survey or informal conversation. Find out what their barriers are and what would help. You may even consider training staff members as Physical Activity Champions. This can provide a valuable development opportunity for the individual and generate a sustainable model of peer-to-peer support and employee-driven activity. [Workplace Movement](#) can offer further guidance and Physical Activity Champion training.
5. **Provide ideas and resources** – share some of the tools and ideas we have pulled together on [page 14](#) or send out some of the shareable resources on [page 11](#).



# How to influence your employees through behaviour changes principles

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We all know that being active is good for our health but that's not always enough to change our behaviour or tackle the practical and emotional barriers that can stand in our way. Changing behaviour is a combination of helping people feel **capable** of doing it, providing **opportunities**, and **motivating** them to join in. Here are some ideas of how you can further support and empower your employees to get active:

- **Everything counts** – redefine what it means to be active and show your employees that any type of movement is valid, from a lunchtime walk up to a high-intensity workout. Even just getting up and moving around more makes a difference.
- **Think about language** – for those who are less active and less confident about their ability, the words “exercise” and “sport” may have negative implications whereas “being active” or “moving more” can feel more accessible.
- **Normalise an active working day** – show how senior leaders are getting involved and share examples of what staff are doing so this becomes a regular part of the working day.
- **Show “people like me”** – if you’re using imagery, make it relatable and show a diverse range of people from different backgrounds and activity levels getting active in a variety of ways that reflect your workforce.
- **Sell the benefits** – motivate employees by talking about the benefits of exercise beyond the obvious health ones – boost your energy, get away from the screen, connect with friends or team mates, build in self-care, destress, look after your mental health and create a barrier between work and home life.
- **Make it social** – people are missing interacting with colleagues and research shows that sharing progress and receiving encouragement from other can help with motivation and enjoyment. Consider setting up a workplace group on a digital platform such as Strava or set up a group challenge (see more information in the Resources section).
- **Encourage employees to build a routine** – behavioural science tells us that doing the same thing at the same time each day can help to create longer lasting habits over time.



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# Resources to support your employees

We've pulled together a range of downloadable guides, advice and links to workout content for you to share with your teams

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## Resources you can share with employees

We've worked with ukactive and the Federation of Small Businesses to produce a range of downloadable resources you can share directly with employees. These provide simple, actionable ideas and guidance on putting them into practice.

### 1. Supporting mental health at work through physical activity

Discover how physical activity can support mental health with this guide from Mind and ukactive

### 2. How to fit more activity into your working day

Finding ways to move more during the working day can be a great way to boost your productivity, your fitness and support your mental health

### 3. Moving meetings

Replace a video call with an audio-only call and talk while you walk

### 4. Create your own active working plan in three simple steps

Discover your current habits and barriers and build habits that stick

### 5. Reconnect with your team through a physical activity challenge

Team challenges can be a great way to boost morale and build relationships, as well as improving physical and mental health

### 6. Active Travel: A Guide for Employees and Employers

If you're still travelling to get into work, build some activity into your daily commute and for those working from home, consider a "pretend" commute and take the time to get active



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## Tools and activities to help employees get active

**Join the Movement** is our national campaign designed to help us all find ways to get active as we deal with the coronavirus restrictions. Here is a range of resources that can support employees of all abilities and fitness levels:

### **Getting started:**

Top tips to help you get started and feeling the physical and mental benefits of being more active.

### **Get active at home:**

Free online content you can try from the comfort of your own home.

### **Get active away from home:**

Simple ways you can combine the outdoors with activity.

### **Find an online class:**

Search for free and paid-for virtual classes for all ability levels using our live activity timetable.

### **Find a fitness challenge:**

If you like to follow a structured routine or find motivation in working towards a goal, try a challenge or workout programme.

# join the movement

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## Tools and activities to help employees get active (continued)

### Other resources:

#### Activity finder/Feel inspired

Virtual activities and inspiration targeted at women of all ages, from our This Girl Can campaign.



THIS  
GIRL  
CAN

#### Ways to move

Inspiration and resources to help people with long-term health conditions get active from our We Are Undefeatable campaign.



WE ARE  
UNDEFEATABLE

#### This Mum Moves

Guidance and support to help women to be active during and after pregnancy.



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## Ten quick ideas for employees: How to fit activity into your working day

1. Have a **walking meeting** with an audio-only phone call
2. Take an active lunch break – get away from your screen and go for a walk, run or cycle (get straight into your workout gear in the morning for added motivation)
3. Do an active or even “pretend” commute if you’re working from home and use the time to move
4. Take regular short breaks – 1-2 mins every 30 mins and 5-10 mins every hour just walking up and down the stairs or doing some simple stretches
5. Stand up more regularly – walk around or explore using a raised desk
6. Do some simple **sitting exercises** at your desk
7. Schedule it in your diary and make it your priority
8. Explore the Join the Movement **home workout resources** and find something you enjoy
9. Get active with a friend or colleague – exercising together can be great way to catch up and increase motivation and enjoyment (please check restrictions in your area)
10. Set yourself a **fitness challenge** for structure and added incentive



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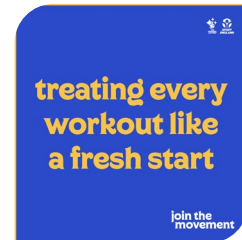
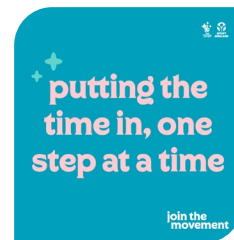
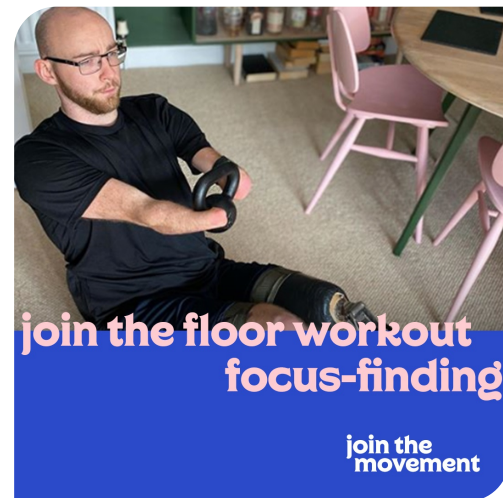
## Join the Movement

A campaign that helps everyone get, or stay, active during the pandemic

As part of our campaign, we've made the following free resources available to employers seeking to promote physical activity within their organisations:

1. Social media assets and templates – add your own logos and images to create your own materials
2. Free-to-use outdoor and indoor activity image library
3. **Register on our website** to access the assets and brand guidelines via the Join the Movement Google Drive

Join the Movement targets the adults who've found it the hardest to be active over the last few months – the over 55s and those on lower incomes. However, you can still use the material to target your audiences if they don't fall into this category.



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## Insight: Activity levels for adults

Our latest Active Lives Adult Survey shows activity levels across England were on course for a record high before the pandemic hit.

However, the spring lockdown led to unprecedented disruption and reductions in activity levels between mid-March and mid-May.

The number of adults classed as active fell by 7.1% or 3.0 million during this period, whilst the number of inactive adults grew by 7.4% or 3.4m adults.

There was also an impact on mental wellbeing. In the initial phase of the pandemic, it was the short-term markers of happiness and anxiety which changed:

- People's happiness score fell by 0.2, to 6.9 out of 10 in mid-March to mid-May
- People's anxiety increased by 0.5, to 3.9 out of 10 over the same period.

The figures also starkly illustrate major challenges facing groups who have long found it hardest to be active:

- Disabled people
- The over 70s
- People with long-term health conditions
- People from Black, Asian and other minority ethnic groups.



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## Recommended levels of physical activity for adults

According to the UK's Chief Medical Officer, people can gain a range of physical and mental health benefits and reduce the risk of many non-communicable diseases by doing the following:

- Taking part in 150 mins per week of moderate intensity activity (such as a brisk walk) or 75 mins of vigorous intensity activity (such as high intensity interval training). This is equal to 21 mins per day.
- Moving regularly throughout the day, especially if they sit for work - take regular breaks to spend time on their feet or use a standing desk or desk riser
- Doing something that builds strength twice a week - this could include carrying shopping, lifting weights, body weight exercises (such as push-ups), gardening, simple balances or yoga
- Please note there is separate guidance for disabled people, pregnant women and women after childbirth.

For more detailed information and useful infographics, see the [UK Chief Medical Officer's physical activity guidelines](#).



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For more information visit:  
<https://www.workplacemovement.co.uk/>  
or contact:  
[ncouzens@activepartnerships.org](mailto:ncouzens@activepartnerships.org)

## Workplace Movement

Workplace Movement is a unique programme run by the charitable network of Active Partnerships to help organisations realise the business benefits of an active workforce.

It offers a range of good value support packages that provide tools, resources and practical, local support and is a great next step for any organisation looking to delve deeper into active working. The programme provides:

- **Workplace Movement benchmark tool** – to assess how your organisation supports active working and provide a clear framework to help you make improvements.
- **Staff wellbeing survey** – an easy to use survey platform that provides insight into workplace wellbeing
- **Online resource library** – a bank of downloadable resources including remote working guidance, active travel, healthy home working, physical activity for mental health and much more
- **Training courses** – including Workplace Physical Activity Champions and Physical Activity for Good Mental Health
- **Bespoke activity tracking challenge** – create a bespoke exercise challenge to motivate and engage your workplace
- **Expert support and advice from your local Active Partnership** – local support from the experts in sport and physical activity.

# Thank you



We hope you find this toolkit useful.

If you have any feedback, or would like to share how your organisation is enabling active working, please contact:

[amy.crees@sportengland.org](mailto:amy.crees@sportengland.org)

With thanks to the following organisations:  
FSB, ukactive, Workplace Movement, Mind



More people  
More active  
More often



Workplace  
Movement

