

# Physical activity in the workplace: recent evidence on its benefits for health and productivity

Actividad física en el lugar de trabajo: pruebas recientes sobre sus beneficios para la salud y la productividad

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Dear director,

The increase in the prevalence of chronic noncommunicable diseases (NCDs), together with physical inactivity in the workplace, poses a public health challenge that requires structural responses from workplace promotion. Various international organizations have highlighted that the workplace is a privileged setting for intervening in sedentary lifestyles and promoting protective behaviors. In this regard, during the working day, physical activity has been shown to be an effective strategy for health and functional performance, as demonstrated by scientific evidence in relation to institutional policies and corporate commitments linked to health and sustainability.<sup>(1)</sup>

A recent systematic review has revealed that multiple forms of physical exercise in the workplace, including aerobic training, strength training, and flexibility training, lead to significant improvements in musculoskeletal health, as well as productivity and occupational performance. This research also points out that most of the clinical trials analyzed report comprehensive benefits when programs are properly contextualized and sustained over time.<sup>(2)</sup>

From an applied perspective, an experimental study conducted in Wales evaluated the Time to Move program, which allowed workers to use one hour of their work-day each week to engage in physical activity of their choice. It was found that 75% of participants complied with physical activity recommendations, and significant improvements in mental well-being and job satisfaction were also observed over a 12-month period. As demonstrated by scientific evidence in relation to institutional policies and corporate commitments linked to health and sustainability,<sup>(1)</sup> the authors concluded that during the working day, physical activity showed to be an effective strategy for health and functional performance.<sup>(3)</sup>

In addition, some randomized controlled trials have proposed interventions with combined characteristics, where face-to-face sessions were conducted with digital tools, showing that it is an effective alternative to increase adherence to physical activity in sedentary workers. This strategy, which integrates technology with the principles of behavior change, is associated with improvements in physiological parameters, quality of life, and work performance.<sup>(4)</sup> Also, a study highlighted the value of physical interventions as preventive measures that could mitigate the economic losses associated with deteriorating occupational health.<sup>(5)</sup>

It has also been documented that employee assistance programs incorporating physical activity and mental health components contribute to improved work performance and a better perception of functional capacity at work. A quasi-experimental study estimated tangible economic benefits per worker associated with the implementation of these programs, which strengthens their viability as a human resources policy.<sup>(6)</sup>

Similarly, brief interventions that combine increased daily physical activity with reduced smartphone use outside of work have shown substantial improvements in indicators such as motivation, work-life balance, and overall mental health. These positive effects have been particularly relevant in work sectors with high cognitive loads.<sup>(7)</sup> Finally, a multilevel analysis developed with longitudinal data from multiple business locations concluded that, although clinical changes are not always evident in the short term, workplace wellness programs generate sustained improvements in healthy behaviors, such as weight control and stress management, which are key factors for the sustainability of human talent in complex organizations.<sup>(8)</sup>

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