



# Tips for Adding Exercise to Your Worksite Wellness Program

## Creating An Effective Work Site Wellness Program

Regular exercise has been well documented as protective against developing chronic disease. For example, a 2005 release by the Journal of the American Medical Association highlighted a study indicating that regular exercise is linked to healthier living and a decreased risk for cardiovascular disease.

Health experts also agree that physical inactivity is directly linked to a host of chronic and weight-related diseases. Such chronic conditions create a significant cost burden for employers, and much of that burden can be reduced by adopting a workplace exercise program.

Corporate fitness centers present an obvious solution for creating exercise opportunities in the workplace. However, the capital investment involved with building a fitness center at the worksite can be prohibitive, particularly for small to mid-sized employers.

Understanding alternatives for incorporating physical activity choices and policy changes in your workplace can help you create a more robust and effective worksite wellness program that will truly get to the needs of the workforce and have the potential for creating a healthy workplace culture.

### Evaluate your programmatic options.

The options are many – those listed here are intended to provide an overview of what’s possible. Search the internet and current literature, poll your workforce, and leverage the passion of your avid exercisers to build a diverse program portfolio.

#### Start Walking Programs

A host of great walking-based programs are on the web. Some are available for purchase (such as Virgin Health Miles); other web-based programs are lower-key and free (like setting up a community at SparkPeople®).

#### Sponsor Group Fitness Classes

Find your available space (such as meeting rooms, cafeteria spaces, and so on). For more on this concept, watch for additional resources at [www.wellness.nifs.org](http://www.wellness.nifs.org) on bringing an effective group exercise program to your worksite.

#### Build an Onsite Corporate Fitness Center

Download the free NIFS webinar titled "Considerations for Building a Corporate Fitness Center" to learn about the four basic concepts you need to work through before you build a facility at your worksite.

#### Add Lockers and Showers

Adding this amenity encourages employees to bike or run to work, or get their own exercise during a break.

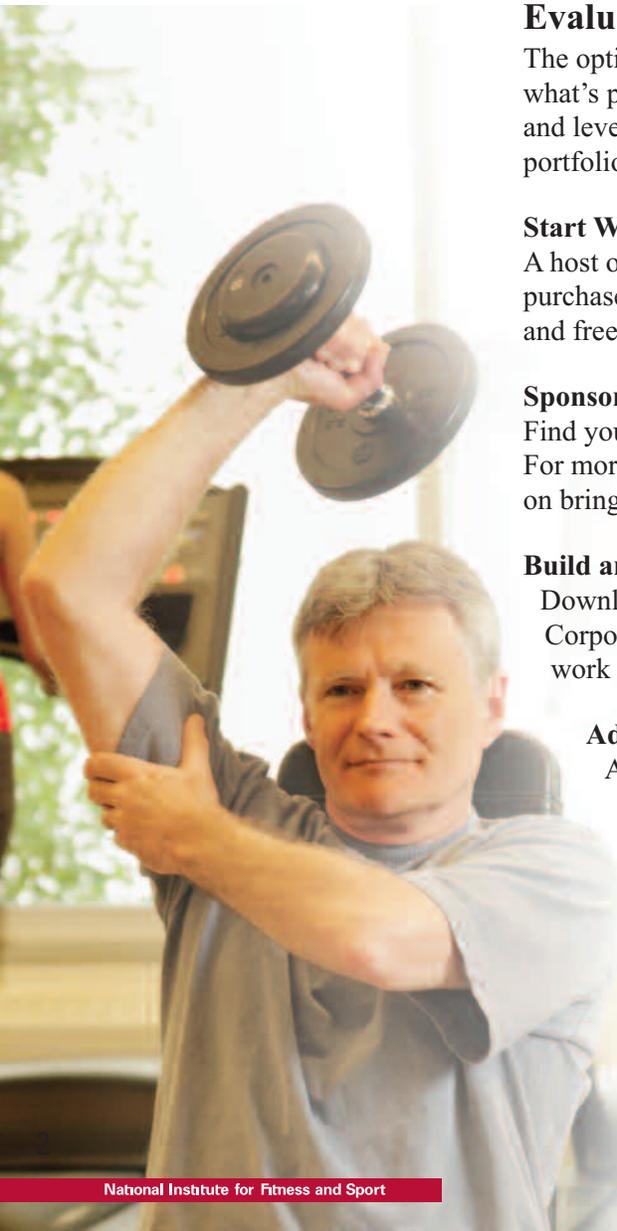
#### Install Bike Lockers for Cycling Commuters

Serious cyclists won't use traditional bike racks because they don't keep their expensive equipment safe. Unless you want to see bikes stashed in offices and other workspaces inside your workplace, bike lockers deserve consideration.

#### Beautify Your Stairwells

Launch a “Take the Stairs” campaign. Visit the CDC’s StairWELL to Better Health website for resources for building a robust and impactful stairwell campaign.

“When employees do not get regular exercise, the long term costs to employers can be significant.”



### **Establish a Physical Activity Information Center**

Create a physical activity hub where employees can find out about community exercise classes, maps/routes to commute to and from work by bicycle, and people interested in finding break-time walking partners.

### **Leverage the Expertise of Wellness Resources**

There are a host of reliable resources on the Internet. The CDC LEAN Works Tools page is a great place to start. The Wellness Council of America also has a variety of free reports and other items available for easy and free download.

### **Generate multi-level support for the programming.**

Your wellness program will be well supported when you create and support healthy workplace policies designed to emphasize leadership support of regular physical activity.

### **Find Your Fitness Champions and Put Them to Work**

There is a good chance you have employees who are already passionate about regular exercise. Leverage their enthusiasm by anointing them as your fitness champions and providing them with enough support to engage those around them to participate in your corporate fitness program. Put those individuals on your advisory committees or wellness teams and empower them to use their experiences to motivate their peers.

### **Create a Fitness Center Reimbursement Policy**

If you don't have a facility onsite, or your fitness center is not accessible to your entire workforce, adding a reimbursement policy for fitness center membership may be an important addition to your wellness policies. Use the web as a resource for writing your policy; search for "Fitness Center Reimbursement Policy" in your favorite browser, or click here for an example.

Check with your insurance provider. They may have a commercial fitness center network you can participate in that offers discounted memberships to your employees as well as countrywide membership for employees who travel routinely. You may also be able to negotiate company membership rates with commercial gyms in your area; most fee-based facilities have an established program for this purpose. You can find out more by calling the facility and speaking to a membership representative.

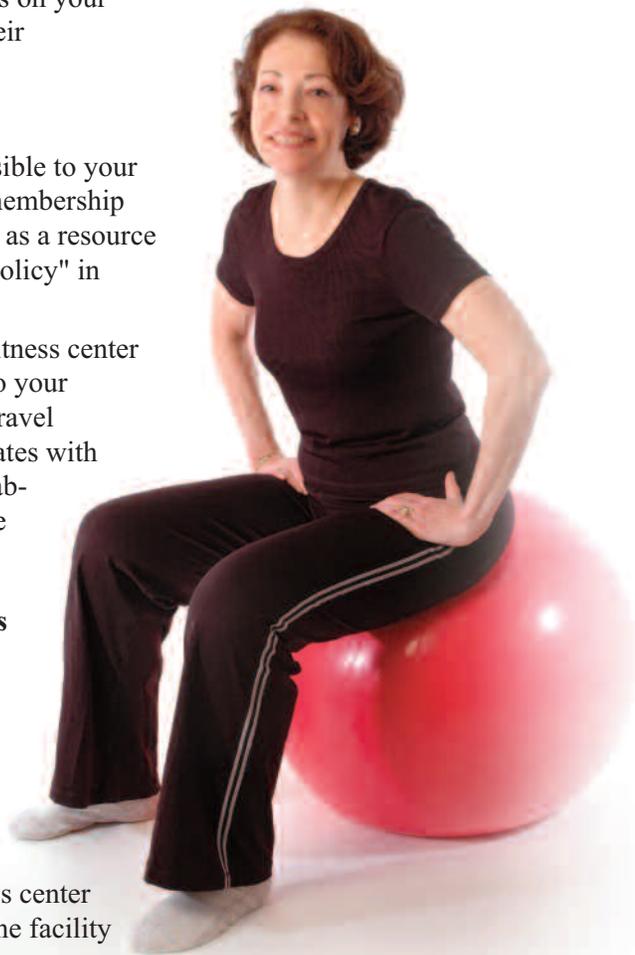
### **Require Fitness Goals as Part of Annual Performance Appraisals**

Imagine the potential to truly move the needle on the health of your workforce by fostering an environment where colleagues help each other achieve their health-related goals. Consider the impact of successfully meeting those goals as a small piece of each employee's performance.

### **Incentivize Participation in the Corporate Fitness Center**

Help your employees connect the dots between your corporate fitness center and your overall wellness strategy by incentivizing participation in the facility — just like you incentivize participation in other parts of your wellness program.

“Imagine the potential to truly move the needle on the health of your workforce.”



“Start with small steps: Build your activity programs slowly.”

### **Provide Flex-time to Allow Anytime Workouts**

Building a variety of physical activity opportunities into the work day will have the greatest impact if your organization supports a flexible schedule for participation throughout the day. Wherever possible, rethink the traditional workday to allow for increased access to exercise options. When you have a traditional hourly workforce (for example, call-center or manufacturing-based), providing flex-time will require some creativity and new thinking to figure out how to maintain business operations while your workforce has 15 minutes of paid daily physical activity time.

### **Subsidize a Walking/Running Club**

Spring for t-shirts for your employee-driven club! Not only do the participants of the running club feel supported by their employer, they also become moving billboards for your organization as well as for your interest in your employees' health.

Manage the budget for this simple program by establishing club rules that allow for the company to subsidize participation in one (or two, or whatever the company can afford) road races per year.

There's a good chance you already have a champion at your organization who will spearhead this club; count on that person to take the initiative and to literally run with it.

## **Outcomes**

Evaluation of your efforts is critical to your program success. Even the most generous of CEO's won't throw cash at initiatives indefinitely. You will need to build a case for the effectiveness of your efforts early on.

### **Begin with the End in Mind**

Build your initiatives with measurable goals and create program options to match the mission of your overall wellness program. Identify what key health parameters are you trying to move in your population and then leverage your physical activity programs to help you get there.

### **Evaluate your Progress**

Evaluation of your wellness programming will be crucial to the program's ongoing success. The best way to capture meaningful return-on-investment data for worksite wellness programming is to map out an evaluation plan prior to launching the initiatives. The same is true for physical activity interventions. While comprehensive wellness program evaluation can be daunting, the CDC provides a framework for evaluation of physical activity programs that may be helpful.

Build your activity program slowly and deliberately so that it is sound and effective. In time you will have built a complete physical activity menu supported by policy change and a supportive culture. Although this is not an easy task, it is the right thing to do for your employees and your bottom line. When your physical activity options are well attended, you will see your health-claims costs come down. Your employees will feel better and your company will perform better.

For more information on assessing or building your corporate fitness center, contact Bethany Garrity, NIFS Director for Fitness Management by email or call 317.274.3432, ext. 208.