



Physical activity and your mental health in the workplace



Physical activity and mental health

Physical activity v mental health¹

We all know that physical activity is good for our health but research suggests that physical activity has a huge potential to enhance our mental wellbeing.

For many of us, work is a major part of our lives. It is where we spend much of our time, where we get our income and often where we make new friends. Having a fulfilling job can be good for your mental health and wellbeing.

Movement is a great way to enhance our wellbeing. Even a short burst of 10 minutes' brisk walking can boost our mood and increase our mental alertness and energy. Movement helps us feel better about our bodies and improve self-esteem. It can also help reduce stress and anxiety and help us to sleep better.

Research shows that teams who are active at work are not only happier and healthier, but also more productive and efficient. Physical activity can actually increase your focus and concentration by releasing hormones that stimulate the growth of brain cells and neural connections.

In 2022/23, there were an estimated 875,000 workers suffering from work-related stress, depression or anxiety, resulting in 17.1 million working days lost.

Mental Health Foundation



Benefits of moving more in the workplace²

- ✓ Improves concentration and alertness
- ✓ Reduces risk of accidents at work
- ✓ Improves sleep
- ✓ Improves self esteem
- ✓ Reduces stress
- ✓ Improves memory
- ✓ Reduces risk of depression and anxiety
- ✓ Makes you feel good



People who are active at work are more able to cope with stress and are less likely to suffer from major health problems, take sickness leave or have an accident at work.

Employees who incorporate activity into their working day report greater enjoyment of their work and improved co-operation and rapport with colleagues, helping managers retain quality staff in their teams.



Physical activity and mental health

Exercise not only has a positive impact on our physical health but can also increase our self-esteem. Self-esteem is how we feel about ourselves and how we perceive our self-worth.

It is a key indicator of our mental wellbeing and our ability to cope with life stressors. Physical activity has been shown to positively influence our self-esteem and self-worth. This relationship has been found across all age groups.

Mental ill health is now the most common cause of work-limiting conditions among those aged 44 years and younger.

The Health Foundation. (2023)



Tips for an active workplace³

Work on your feet

Identify what tasks you can do while standing on your feet or set up a standing desk area to stimulate blood flow and engage idle muscles. Stretch or move a little while reading emails or reports.

Where possible, wear comfortable footwear such as trainers.

Move at your desk

In a never-ending meeting or unable to get up from your chair? Do some simple stretches while sitting at your desk to relieve the tension and stiffness from not moving. If you are on a video call, you can still stretch your legs and core muscles without anyone knowing!



Switch to active travel

Build movement into your day by ditching the car and use active travel. Could you walk or cycle to work? If these aren't feasible, could you park the car and walk part of the journey?



Lunchtime escapes

A lunchtime walk or movement break with colleagues is one of the easiest ways to be active at work. Set up a recurring calendar invite and commit. Just 10 minutes of brisk walking can make a big difference to your health and wellbeing.



Be aware of your energy levels

It is recommended to take short breaks often, rather than longer ones less often. For example 5 to 10 minutes every hour is better than 20 minutes every 2 hours.⁴

Try doing something active when your concentration levels are at their lowest for a boost in focus and concentration.

Take advantage of nature

Being active outdoors will have the biggest effect on your mental health. If you find yourself feeling stressed or anxious at work, take some time to get outdoors to help put you in the best frame of mind for productive work.





Physical activity and mental health

Moving more helps to boost your mental health⁵

One of the most important things we can do to help protect our mental health is regular movement. Looking after ourselves physically also helps us prevent problems with our mental health.

For more ways to move, visit the [Mental Health Foundation](#)



When it comes to movement - doing something is better than nothing

Find moments for movement every day



Move your body while the kettle boils. Make a list of active tasks that you can do in a few minutes, whether you're at home or in the office – empty the recycling, clean down your desk – or do some simple stretches or exercises while you wait.

Set small, achievable goals



When you're beginning to move more for your mental health, set yourself small goals. It might be walking to the end of your street. Start small and increase if it feels comfortable.

Take a break from sitting



If you are sitting for large periods of time throughout the day, set a timer to take regular breaks to stand up, walk around and stretch your body.

Movement looks different for everyone



Focus on you and don't worry about what other people are doing. For your own wellbeing, be kind to yourself and don't feel pressured to keep up with someone else.

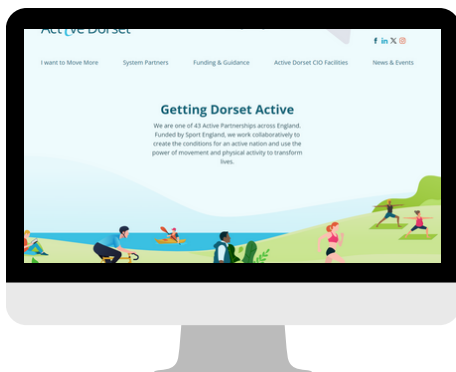
Be kind to yourself



The days when you lack in motivation or are feeling low are likely when you'll see the biggest boost to your mood by getting moving. Think of moving more as an act of self-care that will help you to feel good.



1	Active Dorset Getting active at work	https://www.activedorset.org/active-at-work
2	Physical activity, exercise and mental health MIND	https://www.mind.org.uk
3	Active Dorset Active Workplaces Toolkit	www.activedorset.org
4	HSE guide on workplace breaks	https://www.hse.gov.uk/msd/dse/work-routine.htm
5	Moving more for mental health	https://www.mentalhealth.org.uk/



For more information and guidance on moving more, visit:

www.activedorset.org

