

# Guidelines for Reducing Sedentary Behaviour At Work Places In NL



An Initiative from



## Introduction

The workplace has been identified by the World Health Organization as an appropriate and important setting for physical activity promotion (Quintiliani, 2008). Working adults spend half of their waking hours at work and 30 or more years in the workforce. The workplace environment has its own culture, social support networks and working conditions that are all determinants of health impacting employee health and wellness. As a health promoting agency, with a vision of healthy people and healthy communities, Western Health is sharing resources with employers and work places throughout the region to mitigate workplace sedentary behaviour (prolonged sitting) and support working individuals to achieve their optimal level of health. A healthy workplace provides mutual benefits for both the business and the employee, as good health practices can lead to individual and organizational fulfillment. These guidelines are based on a literature review and provide best practice recommendations to increase opportunities for activity in the workplace.

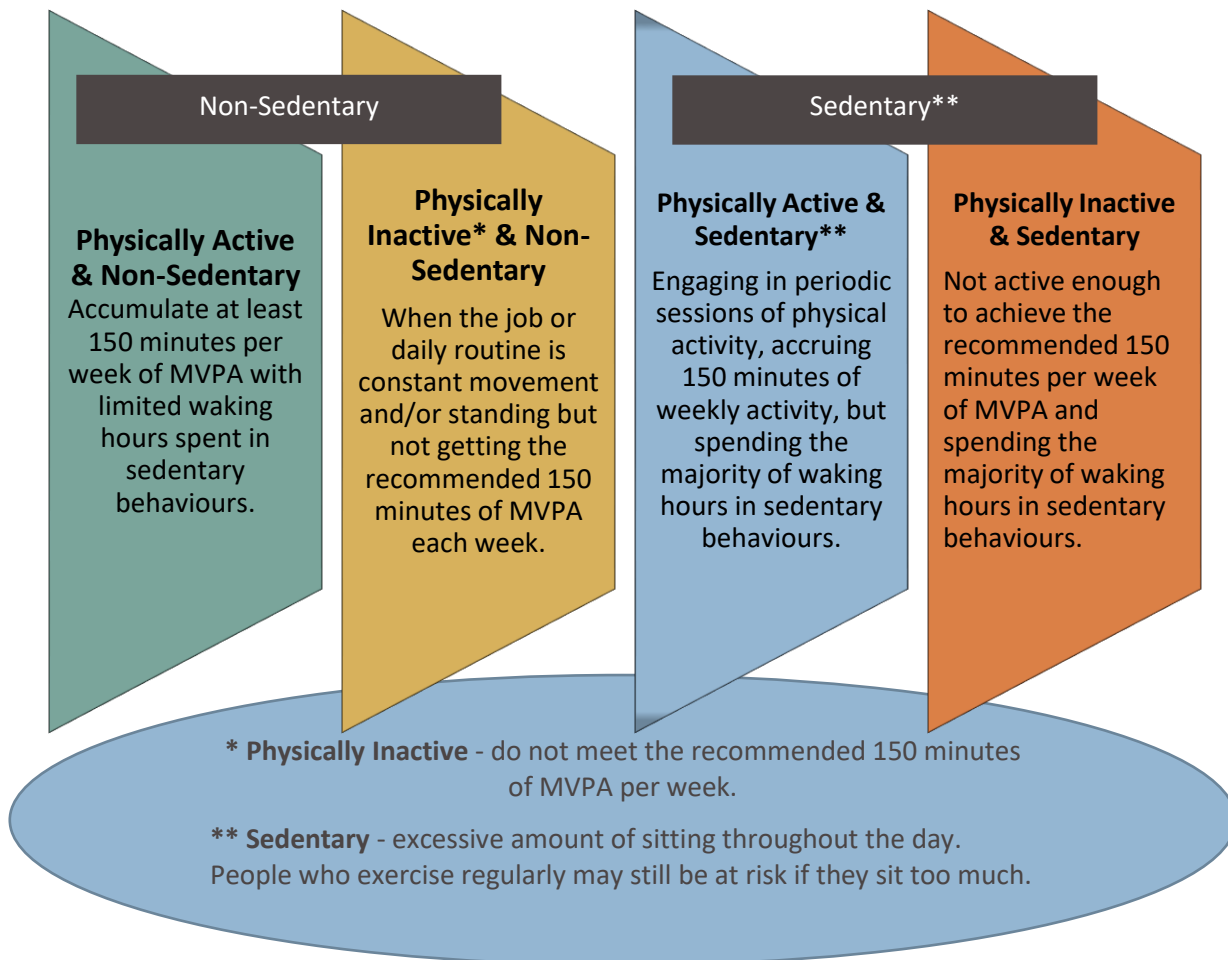
## Rationale

### **Canadian Physical Activity Guidelines for Adults (aged 18-64):**

- Adults should accumulate at least 150 minutes of moderate to vigorous intensity aerobic physical activity (MVPA) per week, in bouts of 10 minutes or more.
- Engage in muscle and bone strengthening activities using major muscle groups at least two days per week.

Physical activity is a known modifiable risk factor, proven to reduce the risks of many chronic diseases. What is less recognized is that sedentary time, or prolonged sitting, is a significant risk factor for the same list of diseases. There are four work-based activity categories that are explained in Figure 1. These guidelines focus on enhancement opportunities to assist employees with less active jobs, to become more physically active and less sedentary. Interventions that can accomplish these outcomes help protect the human and financial resources required to efficiently operate a business.

Figure 1. Work-Based Activity Categories.



Desk-based employees sit for most of the working day and are largely sedentary during working hours, some sitting in excess of four uninterrupted hours to complete their typical workday activities (Penderson, 2014). The Canadian Centre for Occupational Health and Safety (The Government of Canada, 2019) states that injuries resulting from sitting for long periods are a serious occupational health and safety problem. Although sitting jobs require less muscular effort, employees that work in a sitting position develop musculoskeletal complications, cardiovascular risks, metabolic diseases such as Type II Diabetes and hypertension, along with a variety of cancers (Alberta Centre for Active Living, 2015) (Després, 2016).

Ekelund et al. (2016) report that the risks associated with lengthy occupational sitting are only lessened by high levels of moderate intensity physical activity (about 60-75 minutes per day). This study also concluded that periodic bouts of physical activity may possibly curb the risks associated with prolonged sitting and provide a low-cost alternative to disease treatment. Organizations that implement health promotion strategies in the workplace can reduce employee's health risk factors by as much as 56% (WorkSafe Tasmania, 2017). If work places throughout the Western Region can modestly reduce the sedentary behaviours of its desk-based workforce, this will translate into supporting more people to be less sedentary, more likely to reach physical activity recommendations, and reduce risks associated with many chronic diseases.

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- (WorkSafe Tasmania, 2017)

The Alberta Center for Active Living (2015) identified several important outcomes as a result of workplace interventions aimed at increasing physical activity and reducing sedentary behaviour:

- ❖ Increasing employee life satisfaction;
- ❖ Improving mental health;
- ❖ Increasing productivity;
- ❖ Attracting and retaining quality employees;
- ❖ Improving the health status of the workforce.

## Guidelines

These guidelines were developed based on a review of current evidence and literature. From this review, four themes of interventions were identified: organizational culture and norms; challenges and competitions; information and counselling; and access and the physical environment.

1. **Physical Activity as part of the Organizational Structure and Norms.** Workplace culture that is accepting of physical activity and reducing sitting time supports employees to adopt these behaviours. When the workplace culture promotes daily physical activity and accepts interruptions in prolonged periods of sitting, the benefits include reducing employee physical discomfort, improving workplace productivity, enhancing morale and supporting healthier employees. Ways that businesses and organizations can promote physical activity and reduce sedentary behaviour include:

- Implement “Guidelines for Reducing Sedentary Behaviour at Work Places in NL” in the workplace.
- Widespread promotion and communication of the importance of physical activity organizationally.
- Use available resources to promote activity during the work day.
- Conduct a needs assessment to determine how employees feel the organization could help support a healthy, active lifestyle.

Leaders should provide strong, active and visible support. The handout, Stay Healthy and Active at Work from ParticipACTION provides some helpful tips on how to encourage staff to incorporate physical activity into their workday. This includes activities such as:

- Promoting physical activity in the workplace with posters and video demonstrations. Below are a links to videos promoting physical activity in the workplace, they can be shared and promoted to staff:
  - Move More at Work: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-CqrsOq9P3o>
  - Get Fit As You Sit: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ra9TWisWBUy>
  - Break from Busy: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MPAn-bvjllA>
  - Kickstarter: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5ULGzH\\_mV-0](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5ULGzH_mV-0)
- Promoting walking breaks vs. coffee breaks.
- Walking meetings instead of sitting meetings, where appropriate and when physical distancing can be maintained.

- Incorporating “micro- breaks” throughout the day. Encourage employees to take two to three minute movement breaks every hour during the work day. The videos above can help provide activity ideas. This poster from Work place NL may be places in work spaces to encourage adoption of these behaviours by staff. <https://workplacenl.ca/site/uploads/2019/06/microbreaks.pdf>



2. **Offer Organizational Physical Activity Challenges.** These are fun, friendly initiatives designed to encourage employees to increase their participation in physical activity and/or interrupt their sitting time. Ideas for consideration include walking and hiking challenges, among others.
3. **Provide Physical Activity Information and Resources.** Workplaces that want healthy employees need to support them with knowledge and skills to comfortably begin and maintain positive healthy behaviours. These types of initiatives include in-person or online counselling with an expert such as a personal trainer; internet based tools and resources and print media promoting healthy behaviours. The most effective interventions use a combination of information, resources and counselling. Some examples of resources that can be provided to staff include:
  - Signage to promote stair use. Buildings with stairs can use posters near elevators and stairwells as a reminder to walk the stairs whenever possible.
  - Walking routes identified. Beginning with the work place, identify some short routes that staff can travel during scheduled breaks and lunch times. The [Alltrails](#) app can also be utilized in most communities throughout the Western region to identify local walking and hiking trails.
  - The videos and handout mentioned under Guideline #1 are also useful resources.
4. **Access and the Physical Environment.** Minor changes to the workplace’s physical environment can increase opportunities for employees to participate in both purposeful and incidental physical activities. Some examples include:

- Identifying indoor spaces available for staff to use for activity. These spaces may be available from time to time for a planned or impromptu work out. If the space exists, allow employees to use it for physical activity when not required for business use.
- Installation of secure/covered bike racks.
- Improving motivational signage (mentioned in number 3 above).
- Identifying indoor and outdoor walking routes and develop signage and maps where appropriate.
- Promote the benefit of distal parking. Parking a little further away from the work site adds extra steps to the day.



## Conclusions

Sitting is a recognized risk factor for poorer health, contributing to the onset of chronic disease and injuries. The importance of a physically active lifestyle with limited periods of sitting cannot be over emphasized. This one behaviour is proven to provide cardio protection, even when other risk factors such as obesity, hypertension and Type II Diabetes are present (Després, 2016). The work environment is an excellent place to promote physical activity, where the employee and employer both benefit because optimal employee health is an asset for every business.

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