



Be Fit to SUCCEED

If you're looking for that extra edge at work, don't bother putting in the extra hours in the office, go for a walk instead. **David Goding** explains.

Being physically fit not only results in greater health and happiness but can lead to greater work success.

"If you are fit, you are going to cope with the workplace demands a lot easier and with less stress," says Dr Gordon Lynch, Professor of Physiology at the University of Melbourne and Co-founder of Fitness to Live.

“ healthy employees are three times more productive than unhealthy employees ”

"You're energised and feel better about yourself and these things translate to more efficient work practices and better work performance all round. It also brings about more confidence, which has an inspirational effect, not only on you but on those around you."

Indeed, integrating work and exercise has been so successful that many companies have rushed to set up their own in-house health programs.

"It's a two way thing – the employer is investing in the employee's health because there's a return on that investment and it also makes the

workplace a better place to work," says Dr Lynch. "And there's a real incentive for employees to want to work for organisations that have a vested interest in them."

Absenteeism in the form of sick days comes at a considerable cost to organisations. Research conducted by Medibank Private in 2005 and 2007 found that employees with poor health took an average of 18 days sick leave a year, compared with only two days for those who reported good health.

However evidence suggests that presenteeism rather than absenteeism may be the greater problem. Presenteeism is the phenomenon of reduced productivity while you are at work. You may be putting in the hours but you're not performing as you could, due to illness or fatigue.

The study found that healthy employees are three times more productive than unhealthy employees, working 143 effective hours per month, compared with only 49. They estimated that the annual cost of presenteeism to Australia was a staggering \$25.7 billion.

The way in which exercise is incorporated into the workplace is only limited by the imagination.

"There's just so much that you can do," says Dr Lynch. "It could be as simple as an online approach – the dissemination of health information, reminders about healthy exercise and eating habits. Then there are more interactive approaches. A lot of workplaces have lunchtime, after work or before work programs where you get together in groups for different

activities, such as volleyball or soccer. It's also a teambuilding exercise which translates into the workplace."

Then there are workplaces that have taken the next step and set up in-house gyms and monitor the fitness progress of employees. There may be regular heart checks and blood pressure tests and individually tailored routines to meet healthy weight goals.

Making healthy food choices more readily available is also part of the bigger healthy workplace picture.

"Employees need to address the whole vending machine approach," says Dr Lynch. "We need to replace the chips, chocolate bars and soft drinks with healthy rolls and sandwiches, low fat yoghurt and muesli bars, bottled water and fruit juice. Changing bad habits can be as simple as providing a fridge, oven, microwave and toaster and creating a clean, smoke-free area to eat lunch."

Of course being fitter at work means you have more energy for your home life as well.

"It's all about the work-life balance and working smarter rather than harder," says Dr Lynch.

"When we come home from work and we're tired and the last thing we want to do is interact with our families because we're so exhausted it defeats the purpose. We need to be fit for work and fit for our home life as well." ♥

For more information about fitness in the workplace go to www.fitness2live.com.au