

# Introduction

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The *2008 Physical Activity Guidelines for Americans* is the first set of guidelines on physical activity released by the federal government. Being physically active is a key step that Americans can take to improve their health.

According to the guidelines, increasing physical activity lowers the risk of many adverse health outcomes, including heart disease, stroke, high blood pressure, and colon and breast cancers. It can also help prevent weight gain, improve cardiovascular and muscular fitness and strength, prevent falls, improve bone strength, and reduce symptoms of depression.

Adult Americans spend a lot of time in the workplace. Creating a culture of wellness at the worksite may improve employees' health, and a full wellness program can have financial and human benefits. Physical activity should be a major part of any wellness plan. Increasing physical activity in the workplace can make existing wellness programs more comprehensive and is a great way to start a new program.

*Steps to Wellness* can help businesses create or improve worksite physical activity and wellness programs, and create or strengthen a culture of wellness. It includes:

- A case for why your business should create a culture that values physical activity for its employees and encourages them to take part in workplace physical activity and wellness programs.
- Steps you and your business can take to promote physical activity and create a culture of wellness in your workplace.
- **Tools and Templates** to help your business plan, promote, and implement physical activities at your workplace.
- Additional resources about physical activities and worksite wellness programs, including an overview of the *2008 Physical Activity Guidelines for Americans*.



## Terms used within this document:

- **Worksite wellness or workplace health promotion program or initiative** – The various education and other activities that a worksite may implement to promote healthy lifestyles for employees and their families and produce a healthier workforce.
- **Physical activity** – Any body movement that helps you use more energy than you would when resting. Exercise, on the other hand, is a type of physical activity that is planned, structured, repetitive and usually has an objective, like physical fitness and weight loss.
- **Health enhancing physical activity** – Activity that, when added to the baseline activities of daily life (standing, walking slowly, lifting lightweight objects), produces health benefits.
- **Corporate culture** – The norms or “how things get done” within a company. A particular set of attitudes and behaviors that define your company and how employees work together.
- **A culture of wellness, a culture of health** – This is how the company promotes health and wellness for its employees within the company. In a culture of health or wellness, employees know that making decisions to help them be as healthy as possible is important to company leadership.

A culture of wellness starts with leadership and vision. It requires both individual employees and groups to work together and support each other’s health goals. Successful programs align wellness with the values of the company and ensure that the goals and objectives of the program are linked to the company’s strategic priorities.<sup>1</sup>

Physical activity should be a company priority and should be communicated often to the employees in multiple ways. *Steps to Wellness* provides [7 specific steps](#) to create, maintain, and sustain physical activity and wellness programs.

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<sup>1</sup> Hunnicutt, D. (2007). Carefully Crafting Your Organization’s Wellness Plan. WELCOA’s Absolute Advantage, 6(7), 12-19.

**Step 1: Building Support** – This step may be necessary if the company, especially management, has not considered starting a wellness program. Making the business case for a culture of wellness that values physical activity among its employees is a critical first step, but building support is something that needs to be maintained and it is a continual process.

**Step 2: Planning and Assessing** – This step describes how to develop a Wellness Committee and the importance of creating and following time lines. It also describes several types of assessments to consider when creating or enhancing your programs.

**Step 3: Promoting** – This step describes ways to market the programs and activities to employees and discusses different incentives and rewards to consider when encouraging employee participation.

**Step 4: Implementing** – This step describes four different tracks a company can follow to implement a physical activity program in the workplace. An informal quiz found in the *Tools and Templates* section can help determine which track may be most relevant for your company.

**Step 5: Evaluating** – This step provides examples of different types of evaluations and discussions about why evaluating programs is important.

### Foundations of a Corporate Culture of Wellness

- **Corporate Leadership Buy-In or Key Stakeholder Support** – Ensure that your leaders and other key stakeholders are a part of the process to develop your culture of wellness. With their support and buy-in, your physical activity programs are more likely to succeed.
- **Corporate Policies** – Ensure that your company's policies—both written and other—are supportive of a culture of wellness. Review your policies with the appropriate leaders in your company and make recommendations for changes that can support your culture of wellness.
- **Corporate Practices** – Ensure that your company's practices are aligned with a culture of wellness. Take a look at how you do your work and how you conduct your business, as well as your organization's physical environment. See if there are practices you can adjust or physical changes you can make to support your culture of wellness.
- **Financial Commitment** – Ensure that your company is committed to developing your culture of wellness by working with your organization's leadership to secure funding for your programs. Your culture of wellness will be supported by the programs' return-on-investment.

**Step 6: Sharing Results** – This step provides ideas on how to share your program successes with others—both internal and external to your company.

**Step 7: Sustaining** – This step provides information on maintaining buy-in, locating additional sources of funds, and leveraging state and national programs.

Physical activity is one area of focus for a worksite wellness program. Others include nutrition and healthy eating practices, screenings (e.g. blood pressure, cancer, diabetes), breastfeeding support, stress management, and smoking cessation, among others. *Steps to Wellness* focuses on physical activity. If you are interested in broader workplace wellness efforts, please visit the **Resources** section of this guide.

The promotion of physical activity in the workplace can be an effective way to initiate or enhance a wellness program, but it is something that needs to be approached with care. Not all business leaders are interested in creating wellness programs. Similarly, employees may not want to participate in physical activity in the workplace.

- Physical activity should be a part of any wellness program and can be the gateway for wellness in the company.
- Small changes that increase daily physical activity can have an effect.
- The activities presented in this resource can be done at any level and in workplaces of all sizes.



Be sensitive to these and other issues that may arise as you look at this resource and evaluate your own company's interest in creating or building upon a physical activity program. Starting small is often the best way to introduce a physical activity program, slowly gaining the support of corporate leadership and encouraging employee participation.

## Introduction

Below is an overview of the weekly amounts of physical activity recommended for adults. It may seem a daunting task to achieve, but by following some simple steps, you can help your employees reach the recommended level of physical activity per week.

Total Weekly Amounts of Aerobic Physical Activity According to the <b>2008 Physical Activity Guidelines for Americans</b>			
Levels of Physical Activity	Range of Moderate-Intensity Hours a Week	Summary of Overall Health Benefits	Comment
Inactive	No activity beyond baseline	None	Being inactive is unhealthy.
Low	Activity beyond baseline but fewer than 2½ hours a week	Some	Low levels of activity are clearly preferable to an inactive lifestyle.
Medium*	2½ hours to 5 hours a week	Substantial	Activity at the high end of this range has additional and more extensive health benefits than activity at the low end.
High**	More than 5 hours a week	Additional	Current science does not allow researchers to identify an upper limit of activity above which there are no additional health benefits.

**Note:** The amount of time spent participating in physical activity does not need to be done at one time nor in the workplace during work hours. Performing 10-minute bouts of physical activity of any type provides benefits and is better than not moving at all. Examples of moderate- and high-intensity activities are provided on the next page.



### \*Types of Moderate-Intensity Activities

**Walking briskly — 3 miles per hour or faster.**

**Bicycling — less than 10 miles per hour.**

**Water aerobics.**

**Ballroom dancing.**

**Gardening.**

**Tennis – doubles.**

### \*\*Types of High-Intensity Activities

**Jogging.**

**Running.**

**Race walking.**

**Hiking uphill.**

**Swimming laps.**

**Jumping rope.**

**Tennis — singles.**

**Aerobic dancing.**

### **How to Use the Resource**

*Steps to Wellness provides...*

- an overview of the Physical Activity Guidelines. Use these to guide the rest of your work. One of your goals should be to help your employees meet the recommended levels of physical activity per week.
- a business case to help you gain support for your company's leadership. Use this to help show the potential return-on-investment of starting a program. There is a customizable one-pager in the Resources section for your use.
- 7 specific steps to create, maintain, and sustain physical activity programs. Use these steps to develop a program for your company.
- four different tracks of activities for you to consider, depending on where your company may be in its readiness to implement a program. Be sure to review each track, even if your company may not be in that track, as there may be information or activities that are useful for your program.
- resources for you to use in developing, strengthening, and sustaining your physical activity program. Some of these can be used as is and all can be adapted for your company's needs.