



Office exercise: Add more activity to your workday

Too much sitting and too little exercise is bad for your health. So get off your seat and make physical activity — from fitness breaks to walking meetings — part of your daily routine.

By Mayo Clinic Staff

Finding time to exercise can be a challenge. Why not work out while you work? Consider 10 ways to add physical activity to your workday routine.

1. Start with your commute

Walk or bike to work. If you ride the bus or the subway, get off a few blocks early or at an earlier stop than usual and walk the rest of the way. If you drive to work, park at the far end of the parking lot — or park in a nearby lot. In your building, take the stairs rather than the elevator.

2. Stand up and work

Look for ways to get out of your chair. Stand and walk while talking on the phone. Or try a standing desk — or improvise with a high table or counter. Eat lunch standing up. If possible, skip instant messaging and email, and instead walk to a colleague's desk for a face-to-face chat.

3. Take fitness breaks

Rather than hanging out in the lounge with coffee or a snack, take a brisk walk, hike a few flights of stairs or do some gentle stretching. For example, face straight ahead, then lower your chin to your chest. Or, while standing, grab the back of one of your ankles — or your pant leg — and bring it up toward your buttock. Hold each stretch for 15 to 30 seconds.

4. Bring a fitness ball to work

Consider trading your desk chair for a firmly inflated fitness or stability ball, as long as you're able to safely balance on the ball. You'll improve your balance and tone your core muscles while sitting at your desk. Use the fitness ball for wall squats or other exercises during the day. Keep in mind that in some cases, an office chair may be more appropriate.

5. Keep fitness gear at work

Store resistance bands — stretchy cords or tubes that offer weight-like resistance when you pull on them — or small hand weights in a desk drawer or cabinet. Do arm curls between meetings or tasks.

6. Join forces

Organize a lunchtime walking group. Enjoy the camaraderie of others who are ready to lace up their walking shoes. You can hold each other accountable for regular exercise — and offer encouragement to one another when the going gets tough.

7. Conduct meetings on the go

When it's practical, schedule walking meetings or walking brainstorming sessions. Do laps inside your building, or if the weather cooperates, take your walking meetings outdoors.

8. Pick up the pace

If your job involves walking or biking, do it faster. The more you walk and bike, and the quicker your pace, the greater the benefits.

9. If you travel for work, plan ahead

If you're stuck in an airport waiting for a plane, grab your bags and take a brisk walk. Choose a hotel that has fitness facilities — such as treadmills, weight machines or a pool — or bring your equipment with you. Jump-ropes and resistance bands are easy to fit into a suitcase. Of course, you can do jumping jacks, planks, crunches and other simple exercises without any equipment at all.

10. Try a treadmill desk

Consider a more focused walk-and-work approach. If you can safely and comfortably position your work surface above a treadmill — with a computer screen on a stand, a keyboard on a table or a specialized treadmill-ready vertical desk — you might be able to walk while you work.

In fact, research suggests that overweight office workers who replace sitting computer time with walking computer time might lose weight and increase daily physical activity. The pace doesn't need to be brisk, nor do you need to break a sweat. The faster you walk, however, the more calories you'll burn. Although, you'll probably need to keep the speed at 1 mph, as it's more challenging to type if you walk faster than that.

Want more ideas for workplace exercises? Schedule a walking meeting to brainstorm ideas with your supervisors or co-workers. Remember, any physical activity counts.