

Active commuting

Walking to work

The simplest and easiest way to actively commute is walking. It is stress relieving, suits all levels of ability, requires no specialist equipment and can help towards improved health.

Why walk?

UK Government's recommend that adults participate in physical activity for at least 30 minutes, 5 days a week. A daily commute on foot often satisfies this target and has great benefits for health, helping to cut the risk of developing coronary heart disease, diabetes, obesity, stroke and some cancers as well as reducing cholesterol and lowering blood pressure. Walking also helps improve mood and self-esteem.

Alongside this, regular exercise during the working day improves concentration and makes staff feel re-energised and calmer. The result is fewer days taken off work due to ill health, saving the economy millions; during 2007 172 million days were lost to the British economy due to sickness at a cost of £20 billion to the business and public sector.⁽¹⁾

Walking is naturally stress relieving – when people are under stress they often pace up and down. Walking allows time to think, solve problems, listen to music, catch up with friends, watch the seasons change or just daydream.

Encouraging walking

Conduct a travel survey

It is important to find out current travel behaviour of staff, how many people live within walking distance of the workplace and employees needs. For example, if many employees need to bring a lot of equipment to work every day, walking may not be the best form of active commuting for them.

Walking and pedestrian charity, Living Streets, works

Walking facts

- on average it only takes about 20 minutes to walk one mile
- pollution is actually worse inside a car than outside
- walking is the cheapest way to get around (shoes are cheaper than tyres) and money saved on car parking charges can be enormous
- the walk to work will always take the same amount of time as there will be no holdups from traffic jams
- the British Heart Foundation says 10,000 steps a day (about five miles) can promote a healthy heart and reduce body fat.



with organisations to conduct 'walkability audits' to identify physical barriers on the streets that may be stopping people walking and offer solutions to these.

Equipment

- promoting walking requires less equipment than cycling schemes as storage areas such as bike racks are not necessary. However, it is beneficial to provide changing areas for staff as some people may want to change their shoes or clothes on arrival at work
- storage lockers or a cloakroom area may also be beneficial so people can store walking shoes, coats or a change of clothes during the day. Although walking is a less intense form of exercise than cycling or running to work, some staff may also appreciate having the option to shower on arrival
- pedometers could be provided so staff can count the number of steps they take on each walk, and some pedometers also calculate distance walked and calories burned. This gives people a sense of achievement if they gradually increase the number of steps taken
- having umbrellas or shower proof ponchos available for rainy days can encourage more staff to walk when the weather is overcast as



it is guaranteed that they will have waterproof protection to walk home with at the end of the day.

Providing information and maps

Recruiting a champion to be enthusiastic about walking and who can provide information and encouragement can be very advantageous. As with a pool bike scheme coordinator, it is essential that this role is embedded into a job description so that a walking scheme doesn't 'fizzle out' or disappear if the champion moves on. Having more than one champion will cover periods of annual leave, etc.

Knowing the quickest, safest or most interesting walking routes is essential. *Active commuting: Overcoming personal barriers* (part of this toolkit) lists sources of walking and cycling routes.

Having maps and information readily available makes it easy for staff to find out the best routes for them and so more likely to walk part or all of the way to work. In addition to walking routes, public transport maps and timetables should be available for people who live further afield.

- putting information about walking and local walking route maps on an organisation intranet, or reception area makes it easy for staff to access the information they need. Walking schemes or lunch time walks can also be promoted through e-bulletins and newsletters
- setting up a group to create a map of the area with walking and cycling routes as well as areas of interest, bus and train stations encourages people to explore the area to find the best routes, increases enthusiasm for walking and promotes team building
- promoting walking events such as charity fundraisers can promote a team spirit for walking. National Walk to Work Week and Green Transport Week are also good opportunities to promote walking at work
- negotiating a deal for discounts on walking products with local businesses may make people feel more inclined to walk if they want to use specific walking equipment
- allowing staff to have flexible start and finish times or a longer lunch break may encourage them to walk more
- new routes can often be discovered when walking as most destinations have more than one walking route to get to them. People may come across new places they previously didn't know existed which keeps interest in walking
- where possible staff can be encouraged to have walk meetings, where they discuss as they walk and perhaps stop at a café en-route
- a pedometer challenge is an excellent way of promoting and encouraging walking in and out of work. It works especially well between departments and can be very competitive..

References

1 CBI / AXA, 2008 *Absence and labour turnover survey*

Walking tips and ideas

- walking for pleasure often encourages walking as commuting. Walking groups at lunchtimes can be very successful. These should be run on more than one day a week, if possible, to accommodate those who cannot attend on certain days
- different types of lunchtime walks will attract different types of people, for example faster, fitness walks; 'lunch walks' (walking about 15 minutes to and from a good lunch spot such as a café or picnic area) and walks that go to a particular place of interest or takes in some good views
- recruiting a male walk leaders can encourage men to participate in lunchtime walks as often these walks tend to appeal to women more

Useful links

www.direct.gov.uk - information on road safety for pedestrians

www.livingstreets.org.uk - national charity for walkers and pedestrians

www.walkingworks.org.uk/walking-and-the-workplace - information on getting staff walking

www.pathsforall.org.uk/pathstohealth/workplace.asp - information walking in the workplace, including lunch time walks

www.whi.org.uk - national body promoting and setting the standards for led health walks

To find out more visit www.activetravel.org.uk/toolkit

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