

# 8 things you should be doing to promote employee physical activity but aren't

by Mark Fenton

## 1. Change the conversation.

Stop talking about *just* the obesity epidemic; put attention on the epidemics of inactivity and poor nutrition. Then put the focus on more physical activity and balanced, moderate eating. Less blaming, more action.

## 2. Target the least active.

A fitness center or health club membership will benefit those who are already active--and do little for the least active, most costly employees. Build programs that are inviting to those least likely to "workout." Focus on lifestyle change, not just working out.

## 3. Schedule physical activity time.

Actually schedule physical activity breaks into the day. This can be a designated break time or even group break (such as stretch breaks, like those at an LLBean stitching plant in Brunswick, ME), or merely an additional optional break that employees can take as long as it's being used *only* for physical activity.

## 4. Give real rewards.

Incentivize physical activity with real rewards, such as cash, discounts on health insurance payments, or even vacation days. Use an honor system, or allow employees to record activity at work, or use pedometers, or GPS-equipped phones to catalogue activity.

## 5. Change the culture of the place.

Make physical activity a company priority, as much as worksite productivity, safety, or creativeness. Launch programs to emphasize this: bike, walk, & transit to work events; walking meetings; walk-

with-the-boss events; activity-friendly dress code (no heels); distribute daily fitness messages (join-fitnet@lists.ia.gov).

## 6. Change the infrastructure.

But not just for fitness enthusiasts; build an environment that encourages routine physical activity, such as open stairwells, pathways, a quality transit stop, secure, covered bicycle parking, and a locker room and showers for active commuters.

## 7. Use carrots and sticks.

Pair incentives and disincentives for greatest reach and impact:

Carrot	Stick
Clean inviting stairwells & reminder signs.	Slow the elevators.
Subsidized transit pass, parking cash-out.	Charge a fee (or increase the fee) for parking.
Health insurance discount for physical activity.	Raise standard health care premiums

## 8. Provide tools, from mundane to magnificent.

Walking maps to nearby destinations, pedometers, a loaner bike fleet (snow shoes or cross country skis for winter?), scooters for the halls or grounds – the possibilities are endless.