

Fit for work

Level: Intermediate

Time: 90 minutes +

Summary: This lesson is about how the modern working environment requires us to sit too much. In this lesson, students:

1. study an article that discusses how physically active employees are healthier and more productive, and suggests what companies can do to encourage their staff to be more active;
2. choose the correct statistics relating to physical activity;
3. choose and compare the best advice for getting active;
4. discuss their own activity levels and what their own companies do to encourage them to stay fit.

Materials: One copy of the worksheet per student

Group size: Any

Note: This lesson plan is for both pre-experience and in-work business students based on an original article first published in *Business Spotlight* issue 6/2018.

Warmer

Students talk about their activity levels during work time and at weekends.

Key words

Students match the key words and expressions with the definitions, then find the words in the article before reading through the article and noticing how they are used in context. The words in the task are in the order that they appear in the article.

Key:

- | | |
|-----------------|------------------|
| 1. treacherous | 7. regardless of |
| 2. pill form | 8. boot camp |
| 3. sought-after | 9. provided |
| 4. resilience | 10. conflict |
| 5. sick days | 11. incentives |
| 6. work ethic | 12. sponsoring |

Understanding the article

Students answer the questions with information from the article.

Key:

1. She had a heart attack when she was just 44.
2. She didn't find time in her busy work day, and exercise was not considered to be productive.
3. The time 'lost' on exercise is made back because employees are more productive after they have taken a break for exercise.
4. offer financial incentives for keeping fit; sponsor workplace sports teams; offer flexible working hours to allow employees to exercise before or after work
5. more than 20 million
6. 80 per cent

Numbers and figures

In task a, students discuss which number they think is most likely to be correct in each point, then mark their answers. Provide them with the correct answers. Then, in task b, they should say whether they find these figures to be completely obvious, rather surprising or shocking, etc.

Key:

1. 39 per cent
2. €41 billion
3. 74–78 days
4. 20 per cent
5. 27 per cent
6. 35 per cent

Tips and advice

In task a, students choose one piece of advice from the article that they consider to be the most useful and also easy to follow. Then they should compare answers and justify their choices. In task b, they first read other pieces of advice, then discuss them within the framework of the two questions.

Discussion

Students discuss whether they lead active or busy lives and tell the group what their company already offers and whether they or their colleagues take advantage of the offers.

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Group task

In pairs, students write one or two suggestions – with details – about what to offer the staff in the way of fitness courses, physical activities, relaxation treatments and so on.

Collect the papers containing the suggestions, and redistribute them, making sure students do not get their own suggestions back.

Give the students a couple of minutes to read and discuss the suggestions on their new pieces of paper.

Hold a group talk in which students each say what is on their paper and what they think of the suggestion. Is it likely to be popular or not in their company? If not, why not? Is there a way to adapt it so that the staff may be more inclined to take up the offer?

As a whole group, students decide which of the suggestions (maximum three) they would try out first in their company.

Related topics on onestopenglish

The following listening lesson looks into obesity and exercise.

www.onestopenglish.com/clil/secondary/english-across-the-curriculum/topic-based-listening-lessons/consumer-hot-topics-obesity/551222.article

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1 Warmer

How active or inactive ...

- have you been today?
- were you during your most recent whole day at work?
- are you generally at the weekend?

2 Key words

Match the key words and expressions to the definitions below. Find and underline them in the article, then read the article and note how they are used in context.

boot camp	conflict	incentives	pill form	provided	regardless of
resilience	sick days	sought-after	sponsoring	treacherous	work ethic

1. very dangerous, especially because the dangers are not obvious

2. in the shape of tablets _____
3. wanted by many people but not easy to get _____
4. someone's ability to become healthy, happy or strong again after an illness, disappointment or other problem _____
5. a period of time you take off work because you are ill _____
6. the belief that hard work is important _____
7. without being affected or influenced by something else _____
8. an intensive physical training course _____
9. only if a particular thing happens or is done _____
10. if different ideas or opinions do this, they cannot all be right or all happen

11. things that make you want to do something or to work harder, because you know that you will benefit by doing this _____
12. organizing and supporting an event or activity _____

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Fit for work

by Julian Earwaker



Office jobs are bad for our health. Most of us spend all day sitting behind a desk and have little time for exercise, but making time for physical activity would benefit both employers and employees. JULIAN EARWAKER explains how exercise can be incorporated into working life.

1 It's been described as "more dangerous than smoking, kills more people than HIV and is more treacherous than parachuting". What is it? The answer is: sitting. The *HuffPost* warns that sitting is fast becoming "the smoking of our generation". We are apparently averaging 9.3 hours per day sitting on our backsides. So what can we do about it?

2 One obvious improvement is to walk or cycle to work rather than take the bus or car. Or to get off a stop or two earlier and walk the remaining distance. Fitness apps can help build 10 to 15 minutes of exercise into a busy day. A fitness tracker can monitor exercise levels (and heart rate) and set reminders for taking "active-minute" breaks from sitting. The growing trend for standing desks can help, too.

3 "If you have a job or lifestyle where you have to sit for prolonged periods, the best suggestion I can make is to take a movement break every half hour," said Keith Diaz from the Columbia University Department of Medicine in a CNN interview. "Our findings suggest this one behaviour change could reduce your risk of death."

4 HR consultant Harriet Mulvaney was just 44 years old when she experienced a heart attack climbing the stairs at home. Fortunately, she made a full recovery. "Looking back on it now, I would say I was very inactive," Mulvaney told the BBC. "I thought I was active, but actually, I think I was just busy."

5 According to the British Heart Foundation, more than 20 million people in the UK are physically inactive, costing the NHS around £1.2 billion (€1.3 billion) each year. It's a similar story in the US, where only 20 per cent of the population is getting enough exercise.

6 Health experts often say that if exercise came in pill form, it would be the most sought-after drug on the market. Certainly, Harriet Mulvaney would have been taking it. In her busy job, she seldom found time to fit in any sort of physical activity. Every day, she drove an hour each way to and from work, where she spent eight to ten hours sitting at her desk. Exercise was not seen to be productive. Her story is not unusual – yet the benefits of workplace exercise to employees and employers alike are clear.

7 A study by Leeds Metropolitan and Bristol Universities found that "exercising improved mood and performance, leading to better concentration, [better] work-based relationships and heightened resilience to stress". Research from Denmark shows a significant improvement in performance at work as well as a reduction in sick days when employees take part in workplace physical activity and coaching, as compared to home-based exercise. Improvements in memory, problem-solving, work ethic and mental health have been observed in studies. Importantly, US scientists recently showed that these benefits apply regardless of age.

8 So why not pay workers to keep fit? Ryan Holmes, CEO of Hootsuite, a social media company, encourages his 700-plus workforce to use the company gym and to join yoga classes, boot-camp workouts and team sports before, during and after their working day. Employees can block out an hour of the day for exercise, provided it doesn't conflict with meetings.

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9 “I see employees return from workouts refreshed and better focused on their jobs,” Holmes told the BBC. “Time lost on exercise is made back and more in terms of improved productivity.”

10 UK experts ERS Research & Consultancy suggest further simple steps organizations can take: organizing gym and sports discounts for employees, involving workers in activity planning, offering financial incentives for keeping fit, sponsoring workplace sports teams and providing flexible hours to make time for physical activity.

11 Business consultant and author Nilofer Merchant has found an unusual way to build physical activity into her busy working

day: by holding walking meetings. Instead of a coffee shop or boardroom meeting, she asks business partners and colleagues to join her on a walk or hike. She told the *HuffPost* that she listens better, keeps her mobile devices (and interruptions) out of sight and feels more creative as a result.

12 Harriet Mulvaney has made changes, too. Since her heart attack, she has joined exercise programmes and physical-activity challenges. “I had to think about the job that I did and the life I was leading,” she told the BBC, “and start generally looking after myself better.”

JULIAN EARWAKER is a freelance journalist, prison writer-in-residence and book author.

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3 Understanding the article

Answer the questions using information from the article.

1. What made Harriet Mulvaney realize that she had to become more active and less busy?

2. Why didn't she spend more time exercising?

3. Why is time spent exercising during the working day not wasted time?

4. If companies cannot offer time off for exercise during working hours, what could they offer instead?

5. How many people in the UK are said to be physically inactive?

6. What proportion of the US workforce does not get enough exercise?

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4 Numbers and figures

- a. Decide which number you think is most likely to be correct in each key point from a British heart charity's report about physical activity.

GETTING PHYSICAL

1. Some **29 / 39 / 49** per cent of adults in the UK are physically inactive.
2. About **€1 / €21 / €41** billion is the global cost of physical inactivity to healthcare.
3. The average man and woman in the UK spends the equivalent of **38 / 58 / 78** and 74 days, respectively, each year sitting.
4. Physical-activity programmes at work have been found to reduce absenteeism by up to **5 / 15 / 20** per cent.
5. Physically active workers take **7 / 17 / 27** per cent fewer sick days.
6. Regular physical activity can reduce the risk of coronary heart disease by as much as **35 / 40 / 45** per cent and the risk of early death by up to 30 per cent.

Source: British Heart Foundation: www.bhf.org.uk/informationsupport/publications/statistics/physical-inactivity-report-2017

- b. Which of the figures in task a do you find the most shocking, surprising and unsurprising?

5 Tips and advice

- a. **Underline what you think is the most useful and easy-to-follow piece of advice in the article. Compare your answers and say why you chose that particular piece of advice.**
- b. **Now read these further pieces of advice. Which could you incorporate into your working day? Which are just not practical in your work situation? Give reasons.**

TIPS FOR REDUCING SITTING TIME

1. Stand on the train or bus.
2. Take the stairs or walk up escalators.
3. Set a reminder to get up every 30 minutes.
4. Place a laptop on a large box on your desk so you have to stand up to use it – or use a standing desk.
5. Stand or walk around while on the phone.
6. Take a walking break every time you stop for coffee or tea.
7. Walk to a colleague's desk or office instead of emailing or phoning.
8. Take your dog to work to increase activity and reduce stress.

Source: BBC Health News: www.bbc.co.uk/news/health-39490607

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6 Discussion

- What are the differences between an active and a busy life? Which kind of life do you live?
- What does your company already do to improve the health and physical wellbeing of its workforce? Do you take advantage of these opportunities?

7 Group task

Your new boss believes that happier and fitter staff members will not only take fewer sick days but also be more productive and more likely to achieve their monthly targets. She doesn't know the team well enough yet to decide what might be well accepted and so she has asked for your help in deciding what fitness courses, physical activities, relaxation treatments and so on to offer staff. Write your suggestions down.