

STRATEGIES FOR INCREASING THE PHYSICAL FITNESS OF EMPLOYEES IN THE WORKPLACE

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ABSTRACT. Introduction. Industrialization and the development of modern societies led to an evolution of the motor behaviour of humans. Physical tasks at the workplace got easier, tools that are more modern were invented, and in some cases, it was totally taken by machinery and robots. Unfortunately, deskwork being a sedentary activity, health related issues started to concern our society. **Methods.** The short review of the specialized literature has been done by abstracting data from the eligible articles resulted after searching for the related keywords in scientific databases. **Results.** Authors offer many reasons why strategies for increasing the physical fitness of employees should be implemented at the workplaces and give examples of successful interventions like: involving employees in health related contests, offering free or partially subsidized access to sports facilities and clubs, implementing exercises into the working day or awarding the participation in companies' health programs with incentives. **Conclusion.** The lack of physical exercise affect the health status of the sedentary employees and thus his productivity and cause other derived economic, social and psychological issues. In the current context, promoting physical activity strategies at the workplace is a must. These actions are beneficial for not only the employees and employers but also for physical education and sports specialists as such actions will eventually also increase the number of jobs for them.

Keywords: *physical fitness, workplace, strategies, sedentary, employees*

REZUMAT. Strategii instituționale de creștere a nivelului formei fizice angajaților. Introducere. Industrializarea și dezvoltarea societății moderne au condus la o modificare a comportamentului motric uman. Sarcinile fizice la locul de muncă au devenit din ce în ce mai mici și mai puține, pe măsură ce uneltele moderne au fost inventate, iar în unele cazuri sarcina a fost preluată în totalitate de mașini și roboți. Din păcate, munca de birou fiind o activitate sedentară, problemele de sănătate cauzate de aceasta au început să ne preocupe ca societate. **Metode.** Această scurtă trecere în revistă a literaturii de specialitate a fost făcută rezumând informația provenită din articole de cercetare eligibile, rezultate din căutarea cuvintelor cheie în bazele de date științifice. **Rezultate.** Autorii

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cercetărilor oferă în studiile lor multiple motive pentru care firmele ar trebui să implementeze strategii de creștere a fitnessului angajaților și dau exemple de intervenții cu succes precum: implicarea angajaților în concursuri cu tematică relaționată cu sănătatea, oferirea de acces gratuit sau subvenționat la cluburi sportive, implementarea exercițiilor fizice în programul zilnic de muncă sau recompensarea participării la programele de sănătate ale firmelor. **Concluzie.** Lipsa exercițiului fizic afectează sănătatea angajaților sedentari și astfel productivitatea lor și cauzează, de asemenea, alte probleme de natură economică, socială și psihologică. În contextul actual, promovarea strategiilor de implementare a exercițiului fizic la locul de muncă este necesară. Aceste acțiuni sunt benefice nu numai pentru angajați și angajatori, ci și specialiștilor în educație fizică și sport întrucât astfel de acțiuni vor crește în final și numărul de locuri de muncă pentru aceștia.

Cuvinte-cheie: *fitness fizic, loc de muncă, strategii, angajați, sedentari*

Introduction

Physical work is nowadays becoming almost extinct in modern societies as it is replaced by the work of robots, making it easier for people to make a living. Unfortunately, desk work is mainly a sedentary activity, employees being bound to sit several hours at the office, sometimes in front of a monitor, therefore resulting in health related issues like: stress, anxiety, exhaustion, inefficient sleeping, depression, foggy vision, headaches, neck and shoulder pain, migraines, high blood pressure, cardiovascular illness, loss of flexibility, weight gaining, muscular mass loss, metabolic syndrome, diabetes and others (Computerworld, 2008). According to the above mentions specialized website, Computerworld (2008), office work wears out the human body and causes health alterations. Considering the above-mentioned, physical education and sports specialists should be interested in intervening and improving the physical and health related fitness of this category.

Method

The short review of the specialized literature has been done by abstracting data from the eligible articles resulted after searching for the related keywords (physical fitness, workplace, strategies, employees, sedentary, health related fitness) in scientific databases.

Literature summary

Reviewing the scientific literature results in the summary found below. Firstly, we must acknowledge that the main reasons people practice physical exercise are the need of movement, the need of an optimum health and the need of fulfilment and satisfaction (Tudor, Grigore & Tudor, 2014). The above mentioned authors also conclude that practicing physical activities in groups of people satisfies a large panel of needs which are closely tied to the multilateral development of personality and to the improvement of physical aptitudes, also having a direct effect on the increase of the quality of life.

Rodahl (1989) says that the human body is designed for physical work. The muscular body mass of humans is the equivalent of more than half of the body weight and is designed to energize the body and to perform muscular work. The human physiologic functions imply dynamic rhythmic activity alternated with periods of relaxation. Bergqvist (1995) states that taking the individual away from the repeated cycles of rhythmic contraction and relaxation may predispose the individual to pain, disability conditions, absenteeism, reduced performance in the workplace or to other unwanted outcomes. Even when work conditions and the ergonomic needs are improved, static tension and reduced mobility remain as major predictors of muscular and bone issues, pain, sick leave and other effects of a negative health status. Physical fitness can be defined as the ability to perform physical work at a satisfying level (Council of Europe, 1995). It also often refers to high performance in sports, context in which the fitness is oriented towards a specific task in order to maximize the main components needed in a specific sport.

More generally, physical fitness refers to the necessary mechanical work in an individual's occupation, daily activities and leisure activities. For most individuals in developed countries muscle effort is generally unnecessary at work and daily activities. In this context, fitness refers to an adequate general functionality that can withstand the physical challenges without constraints. It has been found that although physical requirements at work are decreasing, the work capacity of employees decreases to a critical level if there are no physical activities in leisure time that increase fitness. The topic of this research is further motivated by the more and more accentuated prevalence of overweight at the level of the population, 42.4% of Romanian citizens having a Body Mass Index (BMI) that includes them in the overweight category conform Eurostat (2008). MBE Livingstone (2001) studies show that the obesity level in Europe is increasing, mainly in eastern and southeastern countries. This fact is emphasized worldwide by studies like Wang, Monteiro, & Popkin's (2002) that took place in the United States of America, Brazil, Russia and China.

Other recent studies (Tudor & Tudor, 2013) stress that a sedentary lifestyle causes obesity, a bad body posture, low muscle tone, a body mass index and an increased fatty tissue, spine deformities, lack of mobility and flexibility, muscle atrophy, cardiovascular problems, anxiety, etc.

Physical inactivity, among other factors like smoking or an unbalanced diet are elements constantly present in today's lifestyle, rapidly increasing the number of individuals suffering from diabetes, cardiovascular illness or obesity (Bocu, Lupu, Tache & Laza, 2001).

Excess weight is the most prevalent risk factor for cardiovascular disease and one of the factors that improves the least over time in the case of those diagnosed with heart disease. In the recent past, several studies have shown that obesity can cause cardiovascular disease through various mechanisms (Lopez-Jimenez & Cortes-Bergoderi, 2011). However, these conditions can be prevented, the World Health Organisation having recommended 30 minutes of moderate physical activity a day, quitting smoking and a healthy balanced diet.

Reports (Shepell, 2014) offer many reasons why strategies for increasing physical fitness should be implemented at the workplaces. For example costs for employee absence or benefits for cardiovascular disease, cancer and stress can top to 70% of a company's benefit costs. On the contrary, organisations that implemented health improvement programs at the workplace report 11% higher revenue. A summary of workplace fitness strategies includes fully or partially subsidized gym memberships and on-site sports facilities, organised competitions (triathlons, weight loss targets, etc.), workplace walking while on duty and incentives for participating in the company's health programs (free fitness resources, extra time off of work etc.)

Studies had the objective of emphasising some aspects that should be taken into account in order to apply large-scale strategies of promoting physical activity among employees and their families. It is also mentioned that the workplace setting could be useful in promoting the level of exercise through frequent exposures to interventions that influence the employees and indirectly, their families. Furthermore, employers represent a strong stakeholder group that should have an influence on public health policies designed to create physical environment for work at work, as well as within the community (Pronk & Kottke, 2009).

Conclusions

The effects of the lack of physical exercise affect the health status of the sedentary employees and thus his productivity, as (Meerding, Jzelenberg, Koopmanschap, Severens and Burdorf, 2005) also suggest and also cause other derived economical, social and psychological issues. In the current context

promoting physical activity strategies at the workplace is a must. These actions are beneficial not only for the employees and employers but also for physical education and sports specialists as such actions will eventually also increase the number of jobs for them.

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