

Top 10 for 2010: Top 10 Ways to Stay Healthy and Safe in the Workplace

Gillian Goerzen, BCRPA TFL/ PT, BSc(kin)

1. Set Yourself up for Success

Proper work-station set-up is fundamental to the prevention of injury and your general health and safety. Contact your onsite ergonomics specialist, and if your organization doesn't have one use the WorkSafe BC guide (see resources below) to help you.

2. Take Stretch Breaks

Most general recommendations for prevention of repetitive strain injuries suggest taking a micro-break (1-2 minutes) for every 45 minutes to one hour of computer work. Try this simple series of movements: stand up, shake out your legs, roll your shoulders, roll your head forward and side to side (not back), shake out your arms, and open and close your hands. Do each movement for 5-10 seconds. For a tool to help you remember to stretch download the Worksafe Sam "Stretch Prompter" from the WorkSafe BC website (see resources below). Sam will remind you to stretch at regular intervals and even show you what to do!

3. Prevent Eye Strain

Eye strain in the workplace is caused by a number of sources: visually concentrating on one thing at one distance for a long time (think computer screen), fluorescent lighting, poor ergonomic set up of the computer, and glare to name a few. While some of this can be modified (ergonomic set up, and glare for example), some others are more challenging (computer work and fluorescent lighting). To help your eyes manage take eye breaks with your stretch breaks – look away from your current focal point and find another one at a greater distance and allow your eyes to refocus then close your eyes and allow them to rest for a few seconds.

4. Make Meetings Healthy

Meetings don't have to mean sitting around eating pastries and drinking endless amounts of coffee. For your next meeting why not pick up some healthy food choices like fruit or veggies and fill your cups with water. Better yet, why not make it a walking meeting? Not only will the fresh air stimulate you and keep you alert, the endorphins you start pumping from the physical activity will improve your mood and help you see things in a different light!

5. Use Your Knees

Whether we're a desk worker or someone working in a manual labour job, proper lifting technique is crucial for back health and prevention of injury. Lift properly, keep your back straight and then squat down to reach the object being lifted. Lift with your knees, not your back and do not twist your body when lifting – regardless if the item you're lifting is heavy or light! Do not attempt to lift exceptionally heavy objects by yourself. Always ask for help. And, always follow good housekeeping practices. Don't leave tools or

equipment lying around in your work area or hallways. Keep your work area clean & organized to avoid trips & falls.

6. R-E-S-P-E-C-T

A respectful work environment is essential for a healthy work environment. Most of us don't think about being hurt or harassed at work, but in fact, violence is a big problem in BC workplaces. To address this problem, Work Safe BC has introduced regulations to help prevent incidents of violence in the workplace (See WorkSafe BC resources below). Learn more about your respectful workplace policies, and if your organization doesn't have one, work to create one and make your organization a workplace which promotes healthy relationships among employees.

7. Emergency Protocols

Do you know your workplace evacuation plan, fire safety plan, earthquake plan, etc? If you don't there is a high likelihood you're not alone! While we hope they never come into play, emergency protocols and awareness of them is an important piece of employee health and safety at work. Make sure your organization has clear protocols and policies in place and ensure employees are aware and confident about how to follow them.

8. Create a health and safety buddy system

Encourage buddies to support one another in healthy habits (smoke-free, healthy eating, ergonomics, stretch breaks, etc.) but also ensure all employees feel safe doing their job activities and getting to and from work. Especially in those dark winter months, employees who work alone or late at night are potential targets for robbery or violence. It is important that you know the location of all emergency exits and how to obtain emergency assistance. Do not jeopardize your personal safety! Connect workers commuting by transit for walking buddies and encourage employees to find someone to walk out to their car with at the end of the day.

9. Fit in fitness

A healthy body is a fit body; so take steps to encourage fitness before, during and after work and promote a healthy workplace. If you're not already doing so, consider bringing a fitness program onsite. If you don't have space for a full service facility, consider bringing in a Yoga Class to the conference room at lunch once per week, or start up a walking or outdoor bootcamp class – no space required! Think outside the box...because healthy employees = healthy productive workplaces!

10. Strike a Balance

Find a healthy balance which encourages employees to take steps to a healthier lifestyle and safety at work and also enables your organization to 'get the job done.' It may take some time; but by working with your employees to encourage these healthy habits will not only make them more productive; but also helps to engage them and creates better more longstanding employee employer relationships.

Recommended Resources:

WorkSafeBC

Proper Computer Station Set-Up

http://www.worksafebc.com/publications/health_and_safety/by_topic/assets/pdf/comptr_wrkstn.pdf

WorkSafe Same "stretch prompter"

<http://www2.worksafebc.com/Topics/Ergonomics/Resources-office.asp>

A workbook for Employers & Workers: Preventing Violence

http://www.worksafebc.com/publications/health_and_safety/by_topic/assets/pdf/preventing_violence_bk112.pdf

Gillian Goerzen (BSc. Kin) is a Registered Personal Trainer and Director of Development for LifeWorks Health Solutions. LifeWorks provides outsourced wellness solutions to corporations and resorts of all sizes. Whether you are looking for onsite lunch and learn's, workshops and team building events or comprehensive development and management of your onsite wellness facility LifeWorks Health Solutions has solutions that will work for you. Visit us online at www.lwhs.com for more information. Check out our blog at <http://lwhs.com/wordpress/> for more ideas and articles about wellness and our weekly wellness challenge.