

PHYSICAL ACTIVITY AND EMPLOYEE SAFETY

Being physically active has many health benefits. However, it is also important to be safe and take appropriate measures to reduce the chance of injury or illness.

For employees who have not recently been physically active, it is a good idea to ask them to answer some basic questions about their health. This will help them decide whether a visit to their GP is a good idea before they begin any physical activity program.

To do this, you could use a Pre-Exercise Screening Tool¹, and recommend that employees complete the simple stage one component of this tool prior to commencing physical activity (see adjacent text box).

Here are some basic steps that can be taken to reduce the risk of injury or illness.

Warming up

- A simple warm-up should be done before participating in any physical activity and should take five to ten minutes.
- The warm-up should use the main muscle groups, and consist of a low-intensity activity such as walking or slow jogging.
- Stretching should be performed only when the muscles are warm, as stretching cold muscles has limited benefit and may increase the chance of injury.

Cooling down

- A cool-down should be performed at the end of a physical activity session.
- This should consist of reducing the level of activity (e.g. from a run to a jog or brisk walk) for five to ten minutes.
- Stretching should be performed at the end of a session to encourage muscles to relax and help restore them to their original resting length.

Pre-Exercise Screening Questions

1. Has your doctor ever told you that you have a heart condition, or have you ever had a stroke?
2. Do you ever experience unexplained pains in your chest at rest or during physical activity/exercise?
3. Do you ever feel faint or have spells of dizziness during physical activity/exercise that cause you to lose your balance?
4. Have you had an asthma attack requiring immediate medical attention at any time over the last 12 months?
5. If you have diabetes (type 1 or type 2), have you had trouble controlling your blood glucose in the last three months?
6. Do you have any diagnosed muscle, bone or joint problems that you have been told could be made worse by participating in physical activity/exercise?
7. Do you have any other medical condition(s) that may make it dangerous for you to participate in physical activity/exercise?

IF YOU ANSWERED 'YES' to any of the seven questions, please seek guidance from your GP or appropriate allied health professional prior to undertaking physical activity/exercise.

IF YOU ANSWERED 'NO' to all of the seven questions, and you have no other concerns about your health, you may proceed to undertake light or moderate-intensity physical activity/exercise.

Staying hydrated

- To avoid fatigue, cramps, heat illness and dehydration, drink plenty of fluid before, during and after physical activity sessions.
- The required level of fluid intake varies significantly between individuals, due to body composition and level of physical activity undertaken. As a general guideline, it is recommended adults consume 500 ml one to two hours before commencing activity and, if the session goes for longer than an hour, to drink 500-700 ml during that time. Drink as much fluid as needed post-activity, to ensure full rehydration.

Considering the climate

- Being physically active in hot weather puts the body under more strain, so it is important to wear appropriate clothing (light, breathable material), be protected from the sun, and stay well hydrated.
- Being physically active in cold weather may increase the chance of injury as muscles take longer to warm up. Therefore, allow longer to warm up, wear warm clothing, and stay hydrated.

Wearing appropriate footwear and using correct equipment

- It is important to wear shoes that are supportive, well fitted and appropriate for the surface, as well as the activity being undertaken. Shoes should be replaced before they are worn out.
 - If protective equipment is required for a particular sport it should be worn during training sessions as well as games.
 - Any equipment used should be the correct size and weight.
1. Exercise and Sport Science Australia (ESSA), Fitness Australia, and Sports Medicine Australia (SMA) 2011, *Adult pre-exercise screening tool*, available from <http://www.essa.org.au/for-gps/adult-pre-exercise-screening-system/>

These are some basic tips on exercising safety. For more information, visit Sports Medicine Australia sma.org.au/resources/policies/

