

EMPLOYEE BENEFITS

Movement as Medicine Getting Your Organization FITT

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What if one of your health plan members walked into a doctor's office, and that person was given a prescription to walk and lift weights instead of being prescribed pills? This one scenario exemplifies the “Movement as Medicine” concept becoming more popular as individuals and employers acknowledge the vast benefits of regular physical activity.¹ “Movement as Medicine” is an evidence-based initiative encouraging all stakeholders – individuals, healthcare providers, policymakers and employers – to work together to promote regular physical activity.

Movement as Medicine: A Warmup

Whether you prefer to call it movement, exercise or physical activity – the science is the same: we should all be moving more. Regular physical activity is increasingly recognized for its medicinal properties, providing a wide range of physical and mental health benefits. Movement reduces the risk of chronic diseases such as cardiovascular disease, type 2 diabetes and certain cancers by improving blood circulation, enhancing metabolic function and reducing inflammation.¹ Exercise also promotes mental well-being by stimulating the release of endorphins, which act as natural mood elevators and help reduce symptoms of anxiety and depression.² Research also shows that exercise boosts immune function, increases bone density and improves sleep quality, further supporting its role as a powerful preventive tool in healthcare.^{3,4}

Despite the overwhelming evidence supporting regular, lifelong movement, few people meet the recommended level. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention [CDC] recommends 150 minutes of *moderate-intensity activity* (e.g., walking) or 75 minutes of *vigorous-intensity activity* (e.g., strength training, jogging) per week. Yet only about one in four U.S. Adults meet these recommendations.^{5,6}

At first pass, 150 minutes of weekly exercise may seem like a lot – but note that one week has 10,080 total minutes. This means that true health benefits can occur with moving just 1.4% of each week!

Keeping Your Organization FITT

So, as an employer, what makes “Movement as Medicine” a necessary area of focus – and, perhaps more importantly, what can you do to facilitate a more active, healthy lifestyle for your employees? Employers can encourage movement by adapting the FITT Principle of exercise program design (Frequency, Intensity, Time and Type) to create a framework for a broader population health and well-being strategy.

For employers and organizations, we can think of FITT in terms of:

- **F**acilitate Access
- **T**ailor Programming
- **I**ncentivize Engagement
- **T**hink Holistically

Facilitate Access

The term *built environment* commonly refers to the structures, facilities and features in and around which we live and work. Employers may have some influence over the built environment, but more often, this results from broader policy, geographic and systemic factors. In comparison, a *facilitated environment* refers to the factors employers can control. The design of workstations, policies around active meetings and hybrid work and programs to increase access to fitness centers are all examples of the *facilitated environment* within which an employee may operate. Employers can significantly improve access to regular physical activity by assessing flexibility, permission and proximity.

- **Flexibility and permission:** Give explicit permission for people to incorporate movement throughout the day. Flexible schedules and hybrid work can give employees more time to be active by removing commute times. Managers can encourage walking meetings or schedule time during the day for exercise breaks. For organizations where hybrid work isn't an option, creating dedicated time during the day for employees to take movement breaks is an alternative.
- **Proximity:** Physical activity does not require a gym. The easiest first step is to incorporate movement in the places we already work. Removing personal trashcans at desks to encourage extra steps to a central location, subsidizing standing desks or treadmill desks and adding design features to stairwells to make them more inviting are all simple changes employers can make to increase daily physical activity without requiring structured exercise.



Incentivize Engagement

There is no shortage of incentive strategies for employee well-being. One avenue gaining traction is [Lifestyle Spending Accounts \(LSA\)](#). LSAs enable employers to set aside a certain amount of money specifically for healthy behaviors – including movement (e.g., running shoe purchase or gym membership), healthy eating and many others. To incentivize engagement, employers can consider clarity and choice.

- **Clarity:** LSAs provide a great deal of flexibility regarding eligible expenses. Employers should be intentional when creating their LSA and clearly communicate the program to members.
- **Choice:** Individuals are more likely to engage in physical activity when intrinsically motivated.⁷ Having the freedom to choose how to utilize an LSA encourages autonomy, and an employee will likely be more engaged.

Tailor Programming

Find common themes and tailor the movement programs to meet the mutual goals and interests of the employees and employer. Employers must consider alignment and customization when tailoring a movement program.

- **Alignment:** Movement can and should be a part of your broader population health and well-being strategy. Aligning clinical and cultural resources to organizational needs allows for the blending of environments that support employee and company health and wellness.
- **Customization:** There is no one-size-fits-all approach to personal health, and the same applies to organizational strategy. Movement-promoting policies should be developed with consideration for organizational culture, job demands, employee demographics and existing population health and well-being resources.

Think Holistically

Movement-focused policies are most effective when incorporated with a holistic approach that emphasizes and values whole-person health. Employers can embody a holistic approach to movement through integration and personalization.

- **Integration:** As with all pieces of an effective well-being ecosystem, movement-centric resources should be designed and implemented in coordination with other well-being resources. Examples include incorporating movement-related communications into broader benefits communications and ensuring clinical population health resources (such as an Employee Assistance Program) have pertinent information to share with members.
- **Personalization:** Understand and consider different generations and resources. Not everyone wants to—or can—move the same way. Considering variations in interest, ability, age, and other factors can help organizations craft a truly engaging, holistic approach to lifestyle well-being.



The Movement as Medicine concept encourages incorporating movement into daily lives and routines. Brown & Brown encourages employers to use movement and movement-promoting policies as part of their population health and well-being strategy. Through intentional partnerships (e.g., carrier, third-party point solutions, internal initiatives) and thoughtful resource allocation, employers can effectively enable employees to engage consistently with movement.

References:

1. [Exercise is Medicine](#)
2. [Exercise as Medicine for Mental and Substance Abuse Disorders](#)
3. [Effect of Exercise Training on Chronic Inflammation](#)
4. [Exercise is Medicine – The Importance of Physical Activity, Exercise Training, Cardiorespiratory Fitness and Obesity in the Prevention and Treatment of Type 2 Diabetes](#)
5. [CDC Physical Activity Guidelines](#)
6. [Physical Activity and Lifestyle Medicine](#)
7. [The Importance of Individual Choice and Intention in Exercise Adherence and Weight Management](#)



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