

# Exercising And Work Performance

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**We all know that exercising is great for your health, but did you know it can help your work performance, as well?**

According to numerous studies, people who work out are better workers, more productive and happier. Studies show that workers who engage in regular physical activity perform better at their jobs—both in terms of the quality and quantity of work performed—which is something that can really help a company's bottom line.

There are numerous reasons to assume a healthy lifestyle, which includes eating properly and getting in a good amount of exercise each week. According to the American Heart Association, the benefits of physical activity include:

- Improved heart function and lipid profile by [lowering total cholesterol](#) while raising HDL, or good cholesterol;
- Lowered blood pressure and resting heart rate;
- Reduced risk and severity of diabetes by [increasing insulin sensitivity](#);
- Improved strength, balance and endurance; and
- Enhanced self-confidence and independence.

Mayo Clinic, the first and largest integrated, not-for-profit group practice in the world, says exercise improves your mood, combats chronic diseases, helps you manage your weight, boosts your energy level and promotes better sleep, among other benefits.

A good mood, higher self-confidence and great energy levels? It's no surprise workers with excellent health habits display above-par work performance compared to those who don't exercise.

A recent study published in the [Journal of Occupational and Environmental Medicine](#) found that workers with poor health habits display subpar work performance more often than other workers.

The study surveyed over 10,600 workers in Europe and found that more than 10 percent of sick leave and higher levels of productivity loss at work may likely be due to lifestyle behaviors and obesity.

Actually, it seems that obesity has the most impact on poor performance in the workplace. The study found that obese workers were 66 percent more likely to call in sick for 10 to 24 days than normal-weight workers, as well as 55 percent more likely to take more than 25 sick days.



The study concluded that weight appeared to play a very vital role in whether an employee had a fundamental health issue that might cause sick leave. And considering the fact that there are more than 190 million overweight or obese Americans, that's a lot of productivity loss at companies, not to mention a large number of sick days that could be avoided.

Moreover, it's been reported that businesses experience billions of dollars in productivity losses each year from absence due to illness caused by obesity.

Here are some of the key findings of the study in the *Journal of Occupational & Environmental Medicine*:

- 83 percent of obese workers report they've developed at least one disease, compared to 75 percent of overweight workers and 69 percent of normalweight workers.
- Concerning productivity, 44 percent of workers surveyed said they felt they performed less than optimally in the day before taking the survey.
- Almost four percent of those with impaired productivity were found to eat less than half of the recommended amount of fruits and vegetables.

Another study published in the *Journal of Occupational and Environmental Medicine* about seven years ago reported many of the same findings. The study was led by Nicolaas P. Pronk, PhD, with the Center for Health Promotion at Health- Partners in Minneapolis.

The study found that when employees get more physical activity, work performance gets a boost. Physically fit workers are likely physically stronger and have greater endurance, and are less likely to feel fatigued, Pronk found.

Researchers in the study surveyed nearly 700 workers in a variety of occupations and asked them a number of questions regarding number of workdays lost, the quality and quantity of work, interpersonal relationships with coworkers, and how they rated their overall work performance and their perceived level of exertion while at work.

The researchers found "significant associations" between these areas and lifestyle factors. Specifically, the study found that:

- Moderate physical activity was related to both quality of work performed and overall job performance.
- Workers who engaged in moderate and vigorous physical activity were more likely to rate job performance higher.
- Cardiorespiratory fitness made workers more efficient in completing a greater quantity of work.
- Obese workers had more difficulty getting along with coworkers—they also had more absentee days.

According to other research, presented at a past [American College of Sports Medicine \(ACSM\)](#) annual meeting, workers' quality of work, mental performance and time management were better on days when they exercised.

The research findings stemmed from a study involving 210 workers in England, most of whom had sedentary jobs, whose employers had onsite exercise programs. According to an ACSM press release, participants completed questionnaires reflecting the ease of completing tasks using a seven-point scale. This was done on a day when they exercised during the workday and again on days when they did not exercise at all.

After exercising, study participants returned to work more tolerant of themselves and more forgiving of their coworkers. Their work performance was constantly and considerably higher, as measured by: (1) their ability to manage time demands, (2) their ability to manage output demands and (3) their mental and interpersonal performance.

According to the study, the gains were prevalent among the study participants, with a minimum of 65 percent of workers improving in all three areas on days they exercised.

Being in great physical condition definitely can help a company's bottom line. But, there are a lot of occupations where being in shape is an absolute necessity—because for people in these occupations, their jobs depend on it.

Take police officers and firefighters, for example. When a police officer isn't in good physical health, it can mean the difference between catching a fugitive and the fugitive making a clean getaway.

Or for a firefighter, hauling hoses, knocking down doors and fighting flames not only takes a quick mind, but a healthy body, as well. If a firefighter isn't in shape, it will be very difficult for him to pull a victim out of a burning building and carry that victim down a 50-foot ladder.

Adopting healthy eating habits and exercising regularly not only makes you feel great and live longer, but as numerous studies show, it can also positively affect work performance and give you an edge in a competitive job market.

### **Top 10 reasons to get physical**

1. **Keep excess pounds at bay.** Combined with a healthy diet, aerobic exercise helps you lose weight—and keep it off.
2. **Increase your stamina.** Aerobic exercise may make you tired in the short term. But over the long term, you'll enjoy increased stamina and reduced fatigue.
3. **Ward off viral illnesses.** Aerobic exercise activates your immune system. This leaves you less susceptible to minor viral illnesses, such as colds and flu.
4. **Reduce health risks.** Aerobic exercise reduces the risk of many conditions, including obesity, heart disease, high blood pressure, type 2 diabetes, stroke and certain types of cancer. Weight-bearing aerobic exercise, such as walking, reduces the risk of osteoporosis.
5. **Manage chronic conditions.** Aerobic exercise helps lower high blood pressure and control blood sugar. If you've had a heart attack, aerobic exercise helps prevent subsequent attacks.
6. **Strengthen your heart.** A stronger heart doesn't need to beat as fast. A stronger heart also pumps blood more efficiently, which improves blood flow to all parts of your body.
7. **Keep your arteries clear.** Aerobic exercise boosts your HDL, or "good," cholesterol and lowers your LDL, or "bad," cholesterol. The potential result? Less buildup of plaques in your arteries.
8. **Boost your mood.** Aerobic exercise can ease the gloominess of depression, reduce the tension associated with anxiety and promote relaxation.
9. **Stay active and independent as you get older.** Aerobic exercise keeps your muscles strong, which can help you maintain mobility as you get older. Aerobic exercise also keeps your mind sharp. At least 30 minutes of aerobic exercise three days a week seems to reduce cognitive decline in older adults.
10. **Live longer.** People who participate in regular aerobic exercise appear to live longer than those who don't exercise regularly.

