

THE EFFECTIVENESS OF WORKSITE PHYSICAL ACTIVITY PROGRAMS ON PHYSICAL ACTIVITY, FITNESS AND HEALTH. A SYSTEMATIC REVIEW.

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Aim:

To systematically review the literature regarding the effectiveness of worksite physical activity programs (WPAP) on physical activity, fitness, musculoskeletal disorders and other health-related outcomes.

Methods:

A computerised literature search, a reference search and a manual search was performed using the following criteria for inclusion: 1) randomised controlled trial (RCT) or intervention study in which groups were compared on relevant outcomes, 2) working population, 3) worksite intervention program to promote employees' physical activity, and 4) person-related outcomes. A list consisting of methodological criteria was used to evaluate the methodological quality of the studies retrieved. Conclusions were based on a rating system consisting of four levels of evidence.

Results:

27 studies were identified: 15 RCTs and 12 controlled studies (CTs). Five RCTs and none of the CTs were of high methodological quality. The outcomes studied in these studies were physical activity, fitness, flexibility, muscle strength, general health, musculoskeletal disorders, fatigue and cardiovascular risk factors. Strong evidence was found for the effectiveness of WPAPs on physical activity and musculoskeletal disorders. Inconclusive evidence was found for the effectiveness on physical fitness, flexibility, muscle strength, self-reported health and body composition. There was moderate evidence that a WPAP does not have a positive effect on serum lipids and blood pressure.

Conclusions:

A WPAP provides benefits for the employee, as it leads to an increased physical activity level and it reduces the risk to sustain musculoskeletal disorders. With respect to the other person-related outcome variables studied, the scientific evidence for the effectiveness of WPAPs is limited. Because of the disappointing methodological quality of most of the studies included, more high quality RCTs are recommended evaluating the effectiveness on health-related outcomes.