

It only takes 15 minutes to change your health, suggests study

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Corporate Cup, lunchtime yoga, or even 'walk and talks', organizations come up with all sorts of wellness initiatives to encourage people to be more active in the workplace. But before you duck and hide, [recent](#)

[research](#) shows that all it takes is 15 minutes and a touch of gamification to put you on the path to success.

Assessing results from 11,575 participants, across 73 Australian, New Zealand, and UK companies, University of South Australia researchers found that a gamified workplace wellness program—[the 15 Minute Challenge](#)—leads to substantial increases in physical activity levels, with 95% of participants meeting (36%) or exceeding (59%) [physical activity guidelines](#).

In addition, participants' average daily physical activity levels increased by 12 minutes per day (85 minutes per week) throughout the six-week challenge, with the median daily exercise duration being 45 minutes.

Participants also reported improvements in fitness (14%), energy (12%), overall health (8%), sleep quality (8%), and mood (7.1%).

The WHO recommends that adults (aged 18-64) should do at least 150–300 minutes of moderate-intensity aerobic physical activity, or at least 75–150 minutes of vigorous-intensity aerobic physical activity over a week. In Australia [37% of adults and 83% of teenagers do not meet the recommended levels](#) of physical activity.

Lead researcher, UniSA's Dr. Ben Singh, says the 15 Minute Challenge presents an effective mechanism to help boost employee health and well-being in the workplace.

"Regular physical activity provides significant physical and mental health benefits. It plays a key role in preventing and managing chronic disease, such as [cardiovascular disease](#), type 2 diabetes, and cancer, and it also reduce symptoms of depression and anxiety," Dr. Singh says.

"Yet around half of Australian adults do not meet the recommended

levels of physical activity.

"With the majority of adults spending much of their waking time working, workplaces present ideal settings for promoting physical activity.

"In this study we showed that as little as 15 minutes of physical activity per day, can make a big difference when it comes to people's health and well-being. And while the program only required 15 minutes of activity, most people tended to do more.

"The 15-minute goal essentially serves as an accessible starting point—especially for people who are particularly sedentary. So, it reduces barriers to entry and helps build the habit of regular exercise.

"Ultimately, the 15-minutes is a catalyst for increased physical activity, with many participants ending up exceeding the minimum goal and moving closer to or surpassing national recommendations."

Co-researcher, UniSA's Professor Carol Maher says that part of the program's success is in the gamification and the social aspects of the app.

"Encouraging and keeping your team-mates accountable through friendly competition is central to the 15 Minute Challenge app, and a key part of what motivates participants to stay committed and connected," Prof Maher says.

"The program encourages team collaboration, to track rankings, and display cumulative exercise. Achievements are clearly noted, and successes are celebrated. So, it's certainly a tool that engages people to work together and have fun.

"What we need to remember, however, is that addressing inactivity is everyone's responsibility. So, if an employer can initiate an effective, enjoyable, and cost-effective option to support their employees, it's a win-win.

"Physically active employees are happier and healthier; they are more productive, more satisfied, less stressed and less likely to get sick. Sustainable, scalable initiatives—like the 15 Minute Challenge—that can support employees to change their health and well-being for the better, should be on every employer's agenda."

The research is published in the journal *Healthcare*.

More information: Evaluation of the "15 Minute Challenge": A Workplace Health and Wellbeing Program, *Healthcare* (2024). [DOI: 10.3390/healthcare12131255](https://doi.org/10.3390/healthcare12131255)

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