

A healthy workplace can help you keeping your weight, blood pressure and cholesterol levels in shape

Wellness programmes are a win-win for employer and employee

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Dit is de omschrijving

Everyone's gradually returning to the workplace, and that's good news. Research of the Institute of Tropical Medicine (ITM) in Antwerp and Tufts University in Boston shows that our workplace can have a positive influence on our cardiovascular health including blood pressure, weight and cholesterol levels. The study, that has been published in [The Lancet Public Health](#) provides a systematic review and meta-analysis of the last three decades of studies assessing the effects of multi-component workplace wellness programmes (WWPs).

After a long period of remote working and Zoom calls, we are gradually returning to the workplace. It is no surprise that a place where we spend most of our weekdays, can affect our physical and mental state. But our work environment also offers a golden opportunity for health promotion, as our researchers have shown for first time when thoroughly assessing the impact of WWPs on a broad set of lifestyle factors, and cardiometabolic health indicators. By WWPs we mean, for example, organising teambuilding activities, fitness challenges and yoga classes, offering healthy snacks and lunch options, and overall by raising awareness of the importance of adhering to a healthy lifestyle.

121 trials over 3 decades across a wide range of workplace settings

While previous literature reviews suggested benefits of WWPs for lifestyle behaviours and cardiometabolic health, few quantitative meta-analyses have identified and quantified the impact or effectiveness of these programs on employees' health. To address these gaps in knowledge, the study implemented a systematic review and meta-analysis of the last three decades of studies assessing the effects of multi-component WWPs on lifestyle habits and cardiometabolic risk factors.

The researchers did so by reviewing over 10,000 studies and summarizing and quantifying the characteristics and impact of 121 multicomponent WWPs trials that were evaluated with a controlled design. WWPs have been implemented in different settings such as factories, offices, hospitals, and schools and mixed settings. Most tackled a combination of diet, physical activity and weight loss targets. Next to these targets, the study also identified the most impactful intervention components including individual and group education, improvement of the food environment, and financial incentives. From the studies reviewed, the researchers identified enough information to calculate combined estimates for 20 different outcomes out of which 13 were found to be positively impacted by WWPs, especially fruit and vegetable consumption and markers of weight and body mass index.

"We have now concrete evidence on the effectiveness of WWPs, and identified the key components of a successful program, although with information mostly coming from Western populations. As non-Communicable Diseases are becoming a pressing issue in low- and middle-income countries, our efforts show go now to adapt, implement, and evaluate similar programs in broader socio-economic contexts," says Professor José L. Peñalvo, Head of the Unit of Non-communicable Diseases at ITM.

Win-win

In 2017, the World Health Organisation (WHO) identified WWPs as one of the "best buys" for addressing non-communicable diseases, including those related to our mental health. Not only the employee benefits from them, but also the company. WWPs contribute to higher employee satisfaction,

increased loyalty, improved productivity, and lower healthcare costs. After the significant disruption in our work dynamics caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, these new findings will be helpful to help a healthier return to work, conciliate remote and office work, and serve as a benchmark for future WWPs designed to account for remote working.

Non-communicable diseases: prevention is key

Since 2018, the Unit of Non-communicable Diseases strengthens ITM's expertise in understanding and addressing obesity, diabetes, cardiovascular disease and cancer. Non-communicable diseases kill 41 million people every year, representing 71% of all deaths worldwide, 75% of them in low- and middle-income countries with mortality rates accelerating. The institute therefore aims to understand the socio-economic factors and behavioural risks that contribute to the emergence of non-communicable diseases pursuing an upstream approach to these chronic conditions. Every day, the researchers strive to enable scientifically based, tailored strategies that are also efficient and sustainable for public health.