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Entrepreneurs: Get Your Exercise

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A business is only as healthy as its owner. To boost your bottom line, then, consider boosting your heart rate, too. Part one in our small business health and fitness series features tips for bringing out the home gym in your home office.

By: MATT ALDERTON

A home office is a beautiful thing. Located just steps away from one's bedside, it's typically got everything that a successful small business owner needs in order to get through his day. It's got a computer, for instance, a phone, a fax machine and plenty of paperclips, not to mention a hefty supply of staples, liquid paper and sticky notes. The luckiest home office dwellers don't even have to sit at a desk; they can roll out of bed and onto the couch in order to do their day's work while watching *Oprah*, *Ellen* and *The People's Court*.



Photo by: iStockphoto

Unfortunately, what home office heroes enjoy in convenience they lack in physical activity, according to Linda Gottlieb, a nationally certified [personal trainer](#) and active lifestyle coach. "Home-based workers are challenged by the solitary nature of their work," she says, "sitting hours on end without stretching or moving, literally chained to their phone and computer."

If you're among the lucky few who run a home-based business, it may be time to break the chains. Doing so—if only long enough to touch your toes and take a stroll—could save not only your life, but also your business.

The ROI on Physical Activity

Of course, you don't have to work from home in order to avoid activity. Small business owners and office workers nationwide are proof that you can let your body atrophy from almost anywhere, as long as you've got Internet access and an electrical outlet from which to charge your iPhone.

"Today's office environments have changed dramatically," Gottlieb points out. "For example, we e-mail coworkers that sit right next to us, leading to a 7- to 10-pound weight gain yearly."

The problem isn't just physical, however. It's also occupational, particularly for small business owners, who must be at the top of their game in order to build and grow successful companies.

Consider, for instance, the results of a study published in the January 2004 issue of *Occupational and Environmental Medicine*: Researchers surveyed 683 workers, including everyone from accountants to mechanics, and found that employees who exercised at least three days a week accomplished more and produced better work with less effort than their sedentary counterparts. Obese workers, meanwhile, had more trouble getting along with their peers and also had more absentee days, leading researchers to assert that exercise can increase workers' productivity, efficiency and morale.

A more recent survey—conducted last year by [Steelcase](#), a Grand Rapids, Mich.-based manufacturer of global office environments—makes similar assertions. Of more than 700 American office workers who were polled by the company, 80 percent said that exercise has or would have a positive impact on their well being; 78 percent of respondents said that exercise has or would have a positive impact on their overall productivity at work.

The proof is in the Power Bar: As a small business, the odds are already stacked against you; if you take care of your body, however, you'll be better able to take care of your bottom line. The result? Both you and your business will live longer.

Start Small

While it does require a commitment, being fit doesn't have to require a lot of time. In fact, you can up your activity level big time by making a few small adjustments to your daily routine, according to Sandy Shafer, a personal trainer at [The Sports Club/LA](#), a luxury sports and fitness complex in Los Angeles. He offers the following workplace fitness tips for small business owners:

- **Park farther from the office.** If you drive to work, Shafer recommends choosing a parking spot that's far from your office entrance. "This will work two-fold by allowing for more movement before and after work," he says. If you work from home, consider imposing a morning and evening commute on yourself in the form of a walk around the block.
- **Walk around the office.** Whether you work at home or in an office, movement is key. "Instead of e-mailing or calling another co-worker in the office, walk over and talk to them in person," Shafer suggests. "You can also set a reminder on your computer to get up and move or stretch every 30 minutes." If you have a wireless headset, use that so that you can walk around when you're on the phone, too.
- **Rearrange the furniture.** While it's nice to be able to reach your computer, phone, printer and files from one spot, sitting at your desk, you'll burn more calories if you set up your environment to facilitate movement. "Rearrange your office space so that it forces you to get up and move around," Shafer says. "Move the printer to the other side of the room so you have to get up to get the printouts; move file cabinets so you have to get up to look for files."
- **Walk to lunch.** When you own a business, you're often too busy to take bathroom breaks, let alone lunch breaks. Making yourself take at least a 30 minute lunch every day, however, is a good way to get some mid-day exercise. "Lunch time sounds like a time to get outside and go for a quick walk," Shafer says. "If you get a 30 minute lunch, walk for five to 10 minutes; if you get an hour, go for 20 minutes or more."
- **Sit actively.** If you have to spend a lot of time sitting—working on the computer or participating in a conference call—try

an "active sitting" exercise. "This movement includes sitting up straight while working," Shafer explains, "tapping your feet as if you are listening to music, rolling your shoulders forward then backward, rocking side to side and twisting your torso left and right."

- **Schedule movement.** If you don't have a lot of time for exercise, build it into your daily routine. "My message to people working behind a computer is to budget their time into 30 minute intervals," Shafer says. "Work hard for 20 to 25 minutes, then get up and walk around for five minutes, then repeat the process. It has been proven over and over again that working in short bursts increases productivity, and in this case can help one fight the sedentary work environment."

No matter what you do or how you do it, the key to workplace health is movement, according to Shafer. "The farther we get from a hunter and gatherer lifestyle, the worse our health and fitness gets," he concludes. "The human body is made to move in order to stimulate it to flourish and improve."

Indeed, a healthy body is strong, flexible, nimble and poised for growth—just like a healthy business.


For more information on health and fitness for small business owners, stay tuned for future installments in our multi-part small business health and fitness series. They'll feature exercise, relaxation and nutrition tips designed to help you function as well as your businesses does.

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