

## **On-the-Job Fitness for Nurses: 12 Tips for Staying Active at Work**

Despite spending a lot of time on their feet, many nurses struggle to stay fit while working long shifts and putting in extra work hours. Rushed lunches, lack of exercise, and frequent snacking make it a little too easy to put on extra weight. Fortunately, there are easy and creative ways to improve your physical fitness without sacrificing work time or spending your lunch break at the gym. Follow these tips to shed extra pounds and improve your overall physical fitness.

### **#1: Take Advantage of the Stairs**

Every fitness magazine recommends taking the stairs instead of using the elevator, but you can also use the stairwell for more challenging exercises. Run up and down a flight of steps to get your heart pumping and burn extra calories, or take the stairs two at a time to get all the benefits of hiking without leaving your workplace. This type of exercise strengthens the legs and develops stability through the hips.

### **#2: Use Handy Objects as Weights**

No one expects you to tote your ankle weights to work, but adding weight to your routine is good for your health. Use whatever is handy to add weight to your workout, whether it's two full water bottles or a stack of telephone books. Carry these objects as you walk up and down the stairs or perform other exercises.

### **#3: March to Your Own Drummer**

If you can't get to the stairwell, marching in place is a good way to burn calories and work out muscle stiffness. For added health benefits, swing or lift your arms as you march. Not only will you burn calories, but you'll also improve your flexibility.

### **#4: Make Time for Exercise**

One of the greatest challenges of staying fit at work is remembering to take time to exercise. If you don't have time for long breaks, set the alarm on your watch. Every time it goes off, start moving around. Even if you only walk up and down the hall a few times, it's still better than giving up exercise altogether.

### **#5: Get Back to Basics**

Unless you spent time in the military, there's a good chance you haven't performed basic calisthenics since high school. Calisthenics are a great way to get your heart pumping when you have a limited amount of time and space to exercise. Try jumping jacks, windmills, arm circles, and other exercises.

### **#6: Take a Parking Lot Break**

While this tip won't work for those employed at hospitals with off-site employee parking, some nurses can benefit from using their breaks to walk to the parking lot and back. Be sure to take the stairs so you burn as many calories as possible. If you have enough time, walk around the parking lot or use the sidewalk in front of the hospital.

### **#7: Work on Your Balance**

If possible, bring an exercise ball to work and keep it in the locker room or break room. Sit on it during breaks or lunch periods. Sitting on an exercise ball and working to maintain your balance strengthens the abdominal muscles and helps improve posture.

### **#8: Stretch It Out**

As you age, your muscles tighten, making it a little more difficult to move around. Limited range of motion also makes it harder to do simple tasks, so performing regular stretches can increase your quality of life. Stretching may also improve blood flow, increasing the amount of energy you have during your shift. Take time to stretch your calves, hamstrings, quadriceps, and other muscles during your break.

### **#9: Add Isometric Exercises to Your Schedule**

Isometric exercises are done in static positions, making them ideal for work areas without a lot of extra room. You can use structural items such as walls to work on specific muscles. These exercises don't make you stronger, but they can help improve your muscle strength. Isometric exercises are especially helpful if you have arthritis or other conditions that prohibit you from using the full range of motion for one of your joints.

### **#10: Strengthen Your Abs**

It's possible to strengthen your abs while you're working with a simple exercise. While sitting up straight, contract the muscles and hold the position for 30 seconds. Perform this exercise a total of five times per day until you get stronger. Seated swivels can also help you build strength in this area of the body. While standing, brace your upper body by placing your arms on a desk or other flat surface. Rotate your hips 90 degrees to the left. Return to center and then rotate your hips 90 degrees to the right. Make sure your core is engaged during this exercise. Complete 15 repetitions each time for a maximum of five sets per day.

### **#11: Relieve Stress for Better Fitness**

You probably have a stress ball with your company logo somewhere in your locker. It turns out these promotional items are useful for improving your physical fitness. Repeatedly squeezing a stress ball helps strengthen the hands, making it an effective exercise for those who spend a lot of time typing and charting. One of the major advantages of this exercise is that it can be done while sitting at a desk.

### **#12: Make it a Team Effort**

Without the support of supervisors and colleagues, it's difficult to maintain your physical fitness routine at work. Create team challenges to get other people interested in exercise. Ask your supervisor to make small changes that will make it easier for you to exercise. For example, using a headset while making phone gives you the opportunity to stand up more often.

In addition to performing these exercises at work, you can also improve your overall fitness by avoiding unhealthy snacks and eating meals at regular times. If you decide to indulge in a piece of birthday cake or a donut brought in by a well-meaning co-worker, limit yourself to small portions and make it an occasional treat instead of an everyday occurrence. Bring your own lunch so you can control your intake of calories and nutrients. Even if you only shed a few pounds, these small changes can improve your health.