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Fewer sick days taken by active workers

A healthier outlook

By **MICHELLE HARRIS**

A NEW study has suggested physically active workers take far fewer sick days than their sedentary colleagues, potentially saving their employers big money.

The Heart Disease and Diabetes Prevention Centre released this week the results of a six-month study of 400 Australian workers, which showed those who took part in a team-based workplace exercise program took almost half the number of sick days of their co-workers.

Half of the workers participated in the Global Corporate Challenge, which counts the steps of workers over four months using pedometers and encourages them to increase their daily step tally.

Participants took 666 sick days, or an average of 3.3 sick days a person. Those who did not participate took 1128 sick days, or 5.6 sick days a person.

The 200 participants saved 462 sick days, the equivalent of $106,260 based on a cost to employers of about $230 a sick day.

In a report, researchers said employees in teams encouraged and motivated each other to set and reach goals.

Newcastle Permanent Building Society staff said they were benefiting from an organisation-wide effort to improve workers' health.

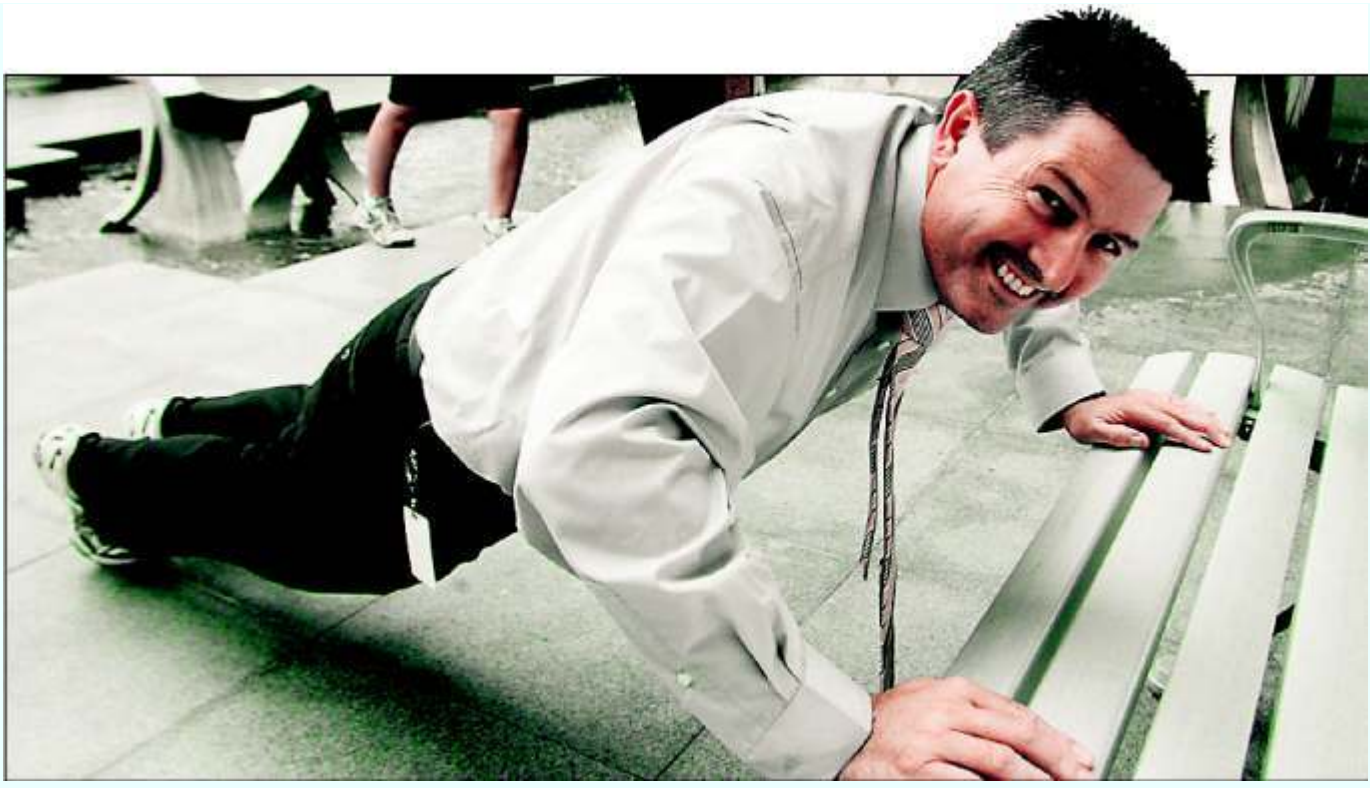
Chief executive Stephen Porges said about 30 per cent of staff had taken up subsidised gym memberships offered as part of a program introduced in November.

Employees undertake health assessments and free heart checks and set fitness goals. If they have met them by the year's end, their membership is reimbursed.

"I think it's made a major difference already," Mr Porges said. "People take the stairs rather than the elevator and are much more energetic."

Fraud investigations officer Cheryl Cribb and colleague Naomi Wagner said the gym provided a stress release and an chance to socialise with colleagues.

IT department officer Bruce White said the program encouraged him to achieve a work-life balance.



BENEFITS: Bruce White does push-ups on a bench outside the building society. — *Picture by Natalie Gron*