

# Taking steps to boost worker well-being

Occupational Health and Safety Bulletin Vol. 19. No. 432

An international study with a key Australian connection shows how walking can boost workers' physical health and mental well-being. The average worker only walks 3500 steps a day but the Centre of Organisational Health and Wellbeing at UK's Lancaster University highlights the major benefits of significantly increasing this daily exercise. Its study was based on the participation of 1800 Nestlé employees in last year's Global Corporate Challenge, the company's largest-ever corporate health initiative. The GCC, founded in Melbourne in 2004, addresses the lack of physical activity in most occupations, which had been linked to more than 20 chronic diseases. It aims to change the health of the average office worker by encouraging them to walk at least 10,000 steps daily, with the benefits to flow on to businesses worldwide. The average Nestlé employee increased their daily walking distance to more than 12,850 steps and reported increased physical fitness levels in terms of weight loss, cholesterol reduction and reduced body fat percentage. The 125-day program showed a notable improvement in mental wellbeing with employees reporting an overall improvement in concentration levels, ability to make better decisions in the workplace, enjoyment of day-to-day activities, self-confidence and productivity. "Participants were found to be more decisive, better able to concentrate and more able to face up to problems. In addition, participants were happier, more confident and generally felt better about themselves at the end of the challenge," said Professor Susan Cartwright of the UK centre.

Former Olympic champion Herb Elliott, who co-founded the GCC along with advertising executive Glenn Riseley and leading nutritionist Shane Bilsborough, stressed the study's significance for Australia. "If companies invest in the GCC initiative, Australia cannot only lead the way in reversing current trends in chronic diseases ... but psychologically improve the mental wellbeing of our workforce," the GCC chairman said. More than 120,000 people were expected to participate in this year's program which started on May 20.