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## Walking good for the bottom line

BREAK out of the chains that bind you to the chair. If you feel shackled to the chair at work and feel the ill-effects of a sedentary life, take the first step to good health. Every step you take counts because a pedometer keeps track of it.

The Global Corporate Challenge (GCC), an Australian initiative, has quantified the healthy effects of walking and says employees can use their feet to take charge of their working lives.

Last year's GCC elicited the participation of 23,000 employees who collectively walked 30 billion steps — which translates to 19.6 million kilometres, an average of 10,516 steps per person every day.

Here's an impressive side effect that might make employers sit up: physically active employees take only half the number of sick days. The reduction in absenteeism

makes dollars and cents which go directly to the bottom line, according to the Heart Disease and Diabetes Prevention Centre (HDDP), which compared patterns of sick leave taken by GCC participants and non-participants through a study.

"Globally, absenteeism costs business big bucks," says associate professor David Cameron-Smith of HDDP. "It has been estimated that absenteeism costs UK companies 478 pounds per employee, while in the US, the cost is estimated at between \$602 and \$789 per employee.

"The new study clearly links participation in the GCC event with a reduced rate of absenteeism," Cameron-Smith says. "The average cost of an Australian sick day is estimated at \$230 per day. Based on this figure, this study suggests that by being

significantly physically more active, the reduced absentee rate of the 200 (Australian) GCC participants amounted to a total cost saving of \$106,260 or \$531.30 per GCC participant."

Healthy habits will help employees win the lifestyle battle, says Australian nutritionist Shane Bilsborough.

"With Australians spending more and more time in the office and diabetes and obesity figures continuing to rise, the workplace is fast becoming a major battleground in the fight against poor health," Bilsborough says.

Global Corporate Challenge for 2008 will run from 22 May to 23 September. Participants use pedometers to count their daily steps and input the figure into the GCC website.