

A loyalty scheme to encourage physical activity in office workers: a cluster RCT

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Plain English summary

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Plain English summary

Inactive lifestyles are bad for your health. We developed the Physical Activity Loyalty scheme to encourage office workers to incorporate physical activity in to their working day. Our study was designed to find out if the Physical Activity Loyalty scheme would help employees to get active during the working day by incentivising walking breaks and providing an interactive website with personalised feedback on goal-setting and the accumulation of Physical Activity Loyalty 'points' (i.e. minutes of activity recorded with remote sensors) that could be redeemed for modest value retail vouchers.

The Physical Activity Loyalty scheme involved employees in four public sector workplaces in two city centres in Northern Ireland, half of whom were randomly chosen to receive the Physical Activity Loyalty scheme programme and the other half were allocated to the control group. We measured participants' levels of physical activity using a pedometer and used questionnaires to look at how they rated their quality of life, the number of hours per days absent from work (through sickness) and their well-being.

The Physical Activity Loyalty scheme lasted for 6 months, with the same measurements taken after 6 months and, again, at 12 months. We held discussion groups with participants to find out about their experiences of taking part.

Despite the vouchers, hints, tips and motivational cues from the website and e-mails, the group who received the Physical Activity Loyalty scheme intervention was slightly less active than the group who had not. However, ratings of well-being were slightly better in those who had received the programme and they had fewer hours absent from work. Feedback on the scheme was positive from participants, retailers and employers, and it is likely that the scheme had wider benefits for the employer in terms of productivity and cost savings.

Given that the programme failed to achieve sufficient change in physical activity as intended, new approaches are needed to explore levels of engagement with programmes such as this.

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