



How Keep Fit Eat Fit helps employees to fight the “sitting epidemic”

Why sedentary behaviour among workers is such a challenge



Many people across the world have developed some harmful 21st century habits when it comes to fitness and movement - or the lack of it - and it is insidiously gripping our populations, never more so than those at work.

This article from the University of British Columbia explores what they refer to as “The Sitting Epidemic” - which is a great way of summarising the problem.

Before the advent of cars for everyone, the invention of labour-saving equipment for everything and the prevalence of technology in our homes, people used to live life very differently.

Walking and running was a commonplace activity undertaken by most people in their daily lives, and sport was something we learned at school and then carried on with afterwards as a social pastime, which also had the benefit of keeping us fit.

Fewer vehicles on the road also meant it was possible to walk around without breathing in lungfuls of polluted air, as we often do now.

What we consider to be advancements in society – which usually are things which allow us all to get the benefits of convenience – sometimes have the unintended consequences of becoming laziness inducers which would never have seemed possible by our parents’, grandparents’ and previous generations.

The trend towards working from home has also accentuated the habit of reduced amounts of movement, especially with back to back zoom meetings and the ‘always on’ culture.



So we recently embarked on a study with the University of Essex to look further into how our platform can help employees address this problem.

The responses and comments we received made us feel that we have created a helpful and easy solution that people love to use.

The prevention agenda



Even the NHS and government have realised that preventing illness is a better approach than treating it - both because of the reductions in common diseases and the cost to the health profession and the economy in general. Hence they are launching a number of initiatives on this theme, with the objective of improving public health and education.

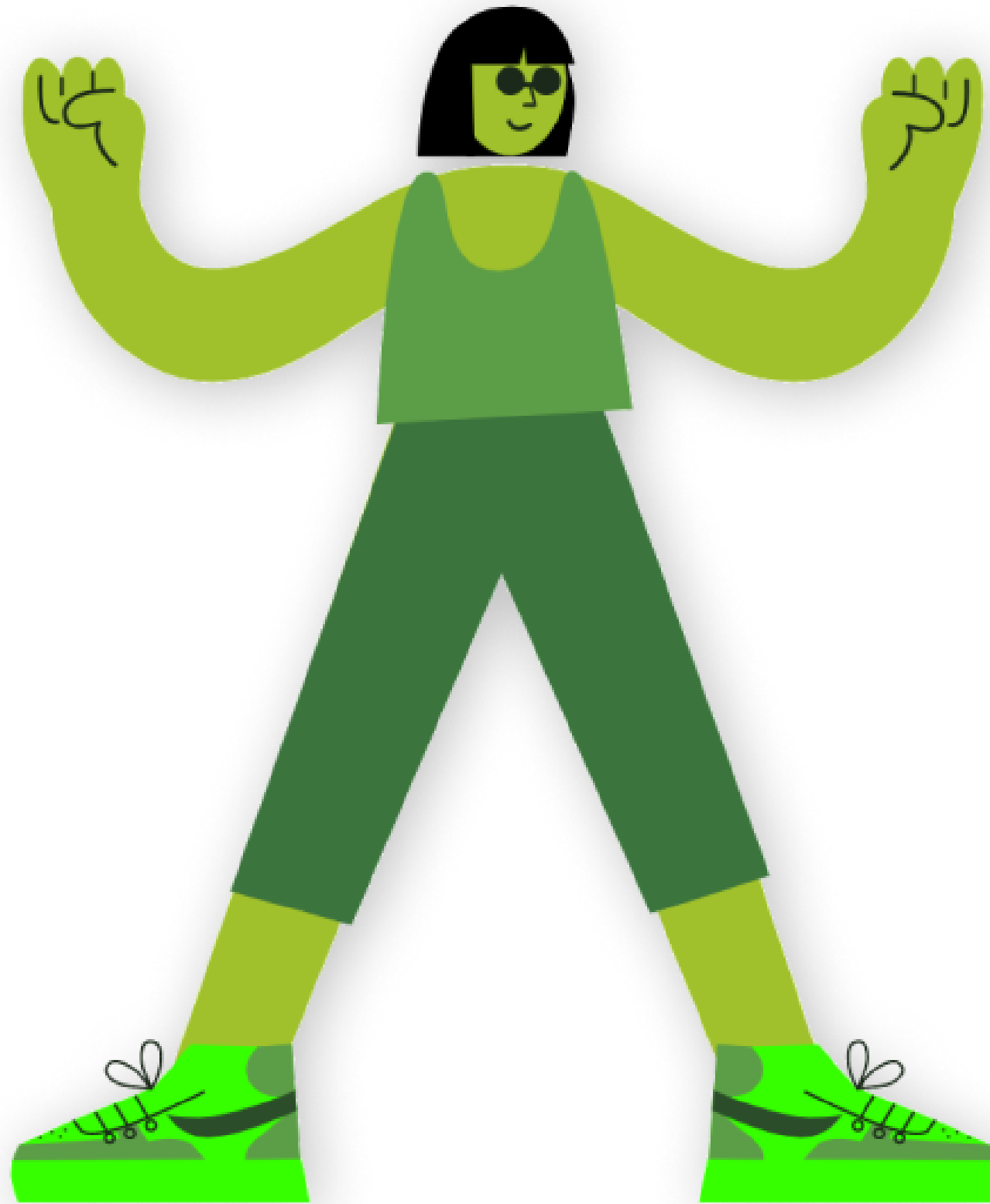
Employers also have a responsibility over their employees, and helping them to stay healthy comes into this remit. Hence the popularity of employee wellbeing programmes and platforms which have swarmed on to the market in particular since the covid pandemic hit.

Our inspiration for the creation of Keep Fit Eat Fit came along way before the pandemic, as a result of working in office based jobs for decades while trying to maintain health and fitness at the same time.

There's more about this in our blog [“Why we set up this business and why wellbeing is now more important than ever.”](#)

In our platform, we have aimed to create a place where employees can enjoy learning about the various aspects of health, fitness and general wellbeing, and nudge them towards behaviour change where needed, in as non preachy a way as possible. Making it fun is also important, so we have a gamified portal where users can collect awards, compete with their peers and interact with social media via the platform.

Rationale for our research exercise



More teleconferencing and home-based work means dedicated employees are increasingly desk-bound and lacking the incidental activity and meal options that they would previously have in an office.

This can reduce their ability to combat the health impacts of sedentary behaviour and less varied and lower quality diet.

Our research reveals that giving employees simple resources that are planned into the workday can supplement their level of activity without disrupting their work.

We demonstrate a new model for employee wellbeing provision in the era of hybrid working, focused on simplicity, planning, and making little changes that add up.

Helping employees “keep fit” (move more and sit less) and “eat fit” (eating the right foods at the right time) can seem like monumental tasks, though, because we humans are often resistant to changing behaviours, even when we know it’s good for us!



“Work gets in the way” - but 2 minutes of exercise is achievable

All the employees who were interviewed told us how easy it was to get engrossed with work, often resulting in having five minutes or less between appointments in a busy workday.

The impact of sedentary behaviour on employees was notable.

One employee spoke about feeling “flat” if they had worked hard all day but done nothing physically.

Another pointed out how failing to move regularly exacerbated existing health issues.

Because of this, short activities that employees could squeeze into spaces between tasks felt more achievable – and therefore more likely to be followed, especially when worked into a plan.

As several employees noted, short two-minute stints were easier to factor into the day and often didn’t interfere with work.

Overall, it was clear that the provision of shorter exercises (two minutes or less) was appealing to busy and dedicated employees who needed activities that could be integrated into their workday.

One key to providing resources that cater to a diverse workforce is to keep a low barrier to entry.

Employees don't need elaborate content and influencer-style videos during their work breaks; in fact, these can even put people off

Simplicity was the key, as employees needed activities that didn't feel like a great amount of effort to do.

Employees who were not already physically active especially valued exercises that were accessible for their ability level.

The shorter, two-minute videos were overwhelmingly popular with employees, who gravitated towards exercises that could be performed at a desk.



Empowering employees with small changes



Employees know what feels good for their health. For example, they recognised that regular movement is good for them, and increasing vegetable consumption was better for their diet.

When they were able to put that into practice, the impact was evident. Two minutes made a difference, one that some immediately recognised.

Employees recognised that little things add up, and regular bursts of exercise did indeed increase their overall level of activity compared to their usual sedentary behaviour.

Employees also do benefit from small, psychological changes: the realisation that moving more and healthier eating can be simple.

Trying new recipes during the study made some of them recognise that it wasn't that challenging to incorporate a better diet into their normal routine – for example, that they could quite easily incorporate more vegetables into their meals.

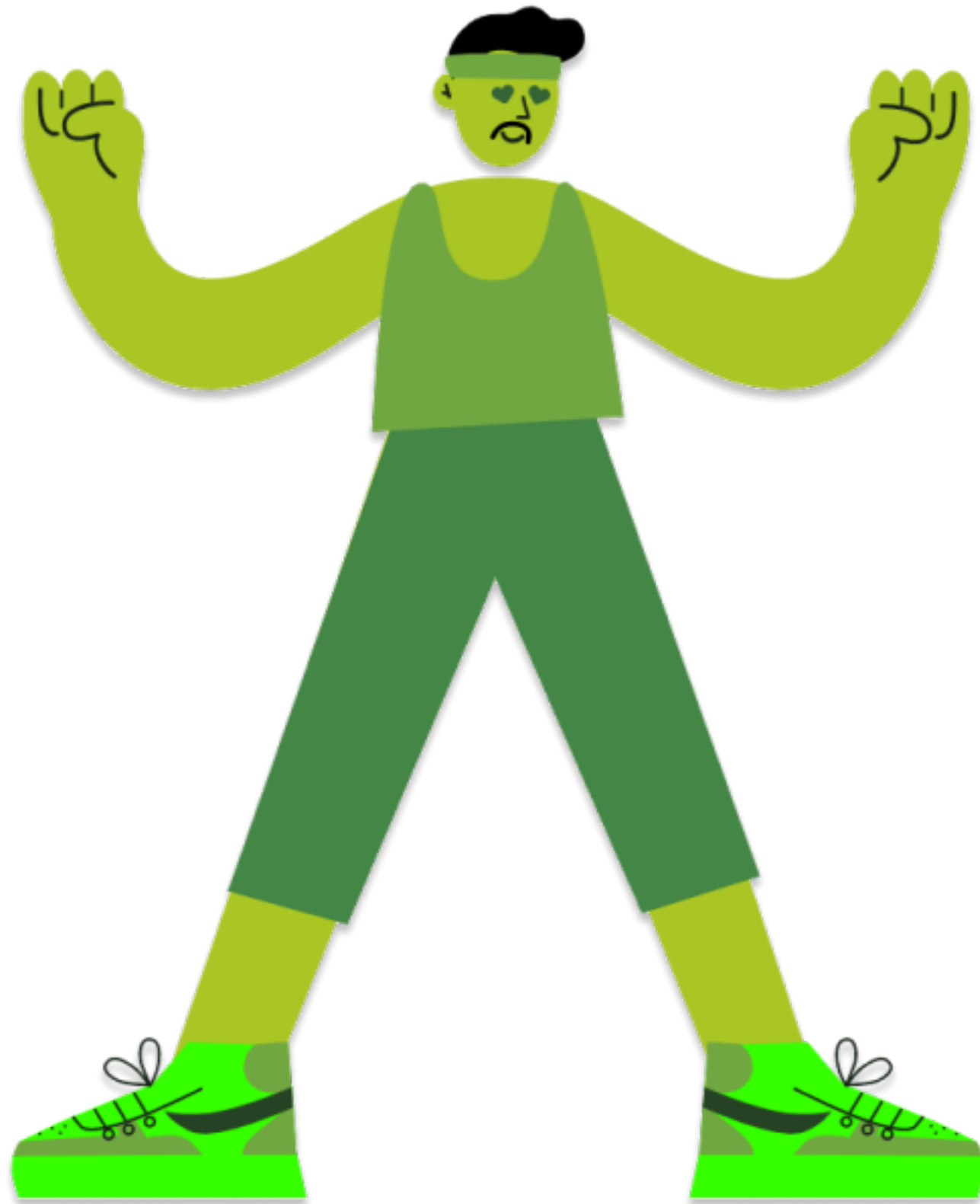
The short exercise videos also changed some employees' perspectives on exercise, moving away from the perception that exercise had to be something long and hard that you had to endure, towards small activities to increase mobility and improve blood flow.

For one employee, overcoming this psychological barrier made it feel more like something they were more likely to stick to in the longer term.

High levels of sedentary behaviour are concerning because they often involve the accumulation of prolonged, uninterrupted periods spent sitting. [Here is a study on this topic](#) (Thivel, D. et al. "Physical Activity, Inactivity, and Sedentary Behaviors: Definitions and Implications in Occupational Health." Frontiers in Public Health, October 2018)

But breaking up sitting time with short bouts of activity – even just two minutes – benefits our health, making us more productive workers. (Carter, S.E., & Gladwell, V. ["Effect of breaking up sedentary time with callisthenics on endothelial function."](#) Journal of Sports Science, August 2017). The question is how to integrate this into one's workday.

Keep It Simple!



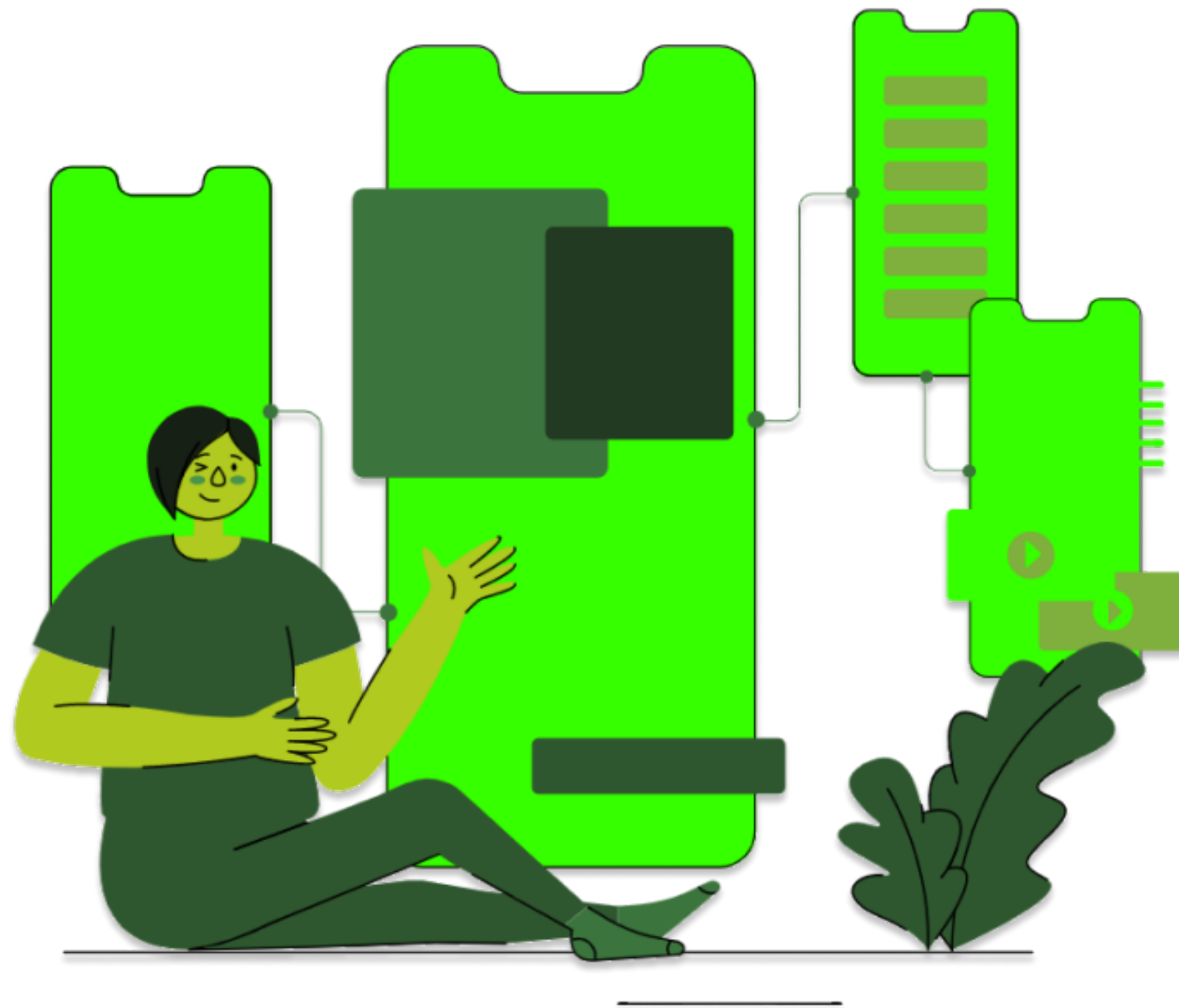
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Plan it in



The study found that giving employees a plan was more successful than letting them explore the resources unguided. This was especially the case for short exercises, where employees who had a plan reported using on average 6 more videos over the week than those who didn't.

Emailing specific recipes and exercises to employees daily meant that they simply needed to click a button to go straight to an exercise.

It makes sense that planning in small changes is effective. As employees found getting caught up with work and losing track of time was a problem, they appreciated the reminder that a plan afforded.

One employee talked about accountability, where the plan made a big difference by reminding them to do their exercises every day.

Employees suggested that plans could gradually ease them into new habits over time. While changing behaviour completely during the study was difficult for some of them, they nonetheless felt that it was doable to gradually incorporate the resources over the long-term and a plan to support that would be welcome.

Conclusion



We found through our study that our approach to breaking up sedentary time amongst desk bound workers is a beneficial and achievable process, but one that needs encouragement and planning to achieve results.

The use of our portal provided the impetus for employees to gradually achieve behaviour change, and when adapted over time the results are impressive.

When setting up our platform, our aim was to provide the tools for this process within our portal, and the broad spectrum of our product means that users can adopt healthier practices by educating themselves on all of the elements of physical, mental and financial wellbeing within one platform.

Here is a selection of the quotes from the research exercise, all from desk-bound employees in a large organisation

“I found it very interesting, and I think if it was sort of rolled out organisation-wide, I think it’d be really useful. I think there were bits there that people can find valuable. So I thought it was really nice.”

“Lockdown was really, really bad. I really needed something to kind of give me a bit of focus. So, I found the suggestions for recipes and exercises you can do really useful because it was a prompt and it made me plan some time in, sort of every hour or so to think, right, couple of minutes’ break now between tasks.”

“The site is a great feature, but it would only work I think if it started at the top. So if I saw for example that senior management and other colleagues are doing this, then I would feel more allowed to do it. The managers will say, “remember work-life balance is important”. Talking is one thing, and doing is completely different.”

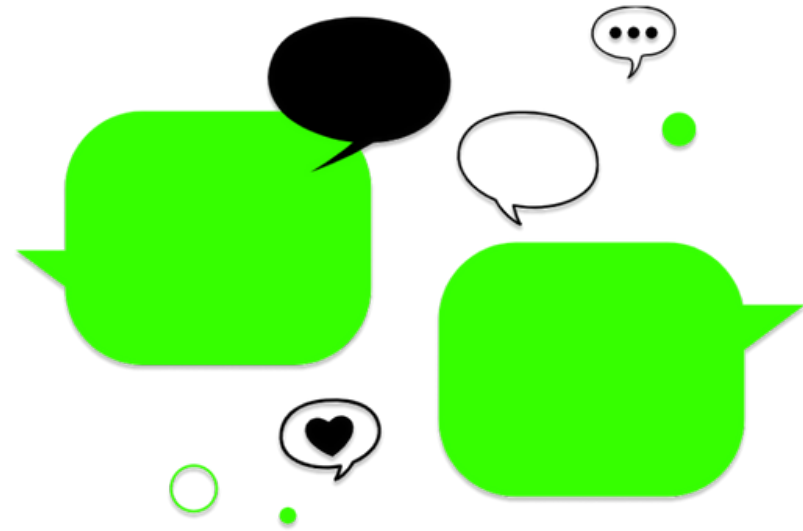
“They were really easy, from the perspective of a person that hasn't exercised since actually being born. I don't like getting tired, and I don't like my muscles sore. I'm very much a couch person. So for me, exercises that Instagram models put out always make me feel worse about myself because I'm like, I could never do it. But then I watched the videos and they look like actually something that I could physically do.”

“I thought it was quite useful that they were giving you ideas, and you didn’t need to go to the gym, you didn’t need a big wide space to be able to do things. These were literally things that were done at your desk.”

“The overall thing for me was just, I was impressed with the content of the actual videos themselves, because it made it so simple, quick, and easy. And part of this sort of thing with exercise is I thought of it being long, hard, and having to endure a half hour run or something to really be achieving anything. But actually, just to kind of get that little bit of mobility at your desk it’s just kind of nice to just embed a little bit of movement into the day.”

“I think it did make a big difference to have two minutes of exercise. I think the thing that makes a big difference is having something that reminded you every day that you had to do it. It gave a little bit of accountability. I do think it changed my working day and it also made sure I eating a big meal at set times and pairing that with exercise. It did mean I was more alert and more energised.”

“There's no special clothing, equipment, anything, you just do it and you don't think about it and it's done. I thought they were brilliant, really easy to use. Nothing you particularly need, just press play and, and off you go. I think my biggest challenge [working from home] was just getting up in the morning sitting at the kitchen table, not always having a lunch break, and if you did, not really enough time to walk very far, round the garden a couple of times, and that was it. So I think for me, anything that was adding to my activity on a daily basis was gonna make some kind of difference.”



Wellbeing portal



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Wellbeing portal mobile



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Thank you for reading!



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