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# Stepping up to better health: could stair climbing be the solution?

November 25th, 2016 by [Tristan Farron-Mahon](#)

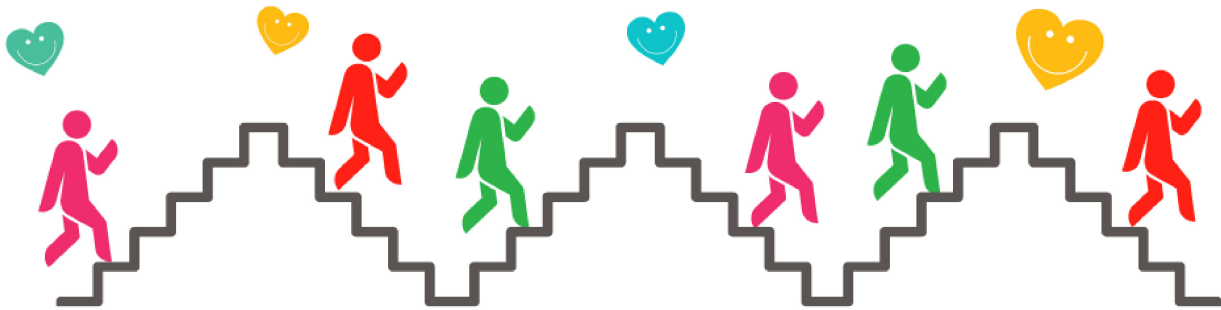
Stair climbing is a powerful way to stay fit, improve our health and burn more calories per minute than jogging, in fact it's officially classed as a 'vigorous' form of exercise by the UK Department of Health.

Simply taking the stairs has the ability to improve our cardiovascular fitness over time. By raising our heart rate, stair climbing helps protect against high blood pressure, weight gain and clogged arteries. This in turn lowers our risk of developing chronic conditions such as diabetes, heart disease, vascular dementia and even some cancers.

The Harvard Alumni Study, one of the biggest scientific studies to date, found that men who climbed an average of eight or more flights of stairs a day had a 33% lower mortality rate than men who were sedentary. That's considerably better than the 22% lower death rate observed in men who walked 1.3 miles a day.

As Dr Harvey Simon, associate professor of medicine at Harvard Medical School, puts it: "Walking up stairs is one of the best-kept secrets in preventive medicine".

In addition to the cardiovascular benefits, stair climbing also exercises our bones and muscles, improving strength, bone density and muscle tone. A benefit that is hugely important in a world where osteoporosis is a growing global problem and hip fractures are set to increase by up to 310% globally by 2050.



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Taking the stairs causes our bodies to release endorphins, these so-called feel good hormones in turn **improve our mental wellbeing**.

## Tackling sedentary behaviour in the workplace

Across the developed world, we now spend more time sitting than ever before and a computer-based, email-heavy working life is a leading driver of the trend. A [major report by UKActive](#) highlighted the severity of the problem causing virtually all of us to sit more and do less, particularly office based workers who on average spend 75% of their waking hours sitting down.

As we're now spending more time sitting at work, focussing on making workplaces more active and healthy is key to improving overall public health.

StepJockey, a Department of Health backed tech startup, promotes stair climbing within the workplace using evidence based stair prompts and a powerful gamification platform. The award winning behavioural change programme provides a simple and evidence based mechanism for making multi-storey offices to become more healthy and productive.

StepJockey buildings are equipped with a network of highly salient smart signs that 'nudge' office staff to use the stairs rather than lifts or escalators. The signs can be read by the StepJockey app, allowing staff to track their progress, view leaderboards and win prizes.

Helen Nuki, the company's founder and a behavioural economist, says women account for 60% of StepJockey users. "Working women want a simple way of keeping fit that doesn't eat into the day or involve parading around in front of colleagues in Lycra."

## Encouraging Londoners to take to the stairs

StepJockey further incentivises activity in the workplace by launching company-wide stair climbing challenges such as Climb Everest, World Towers and the Office Games. Staff take part in teams and can track progress within the app.

Long term trials carried out by StepJockey show that their stair prompts alone encourage 29% more stair journeys when installed in buildings. However, the real benefits come when combined with their unique challenges which promote up to 800% more stair climbing activity.

The system is now used in over 11,000 buildings around the world with London based clients including Disney, UBS, Channel 4, NBCUniversal and The Wellcome Trust.

In 2016, StepJockey launched an innovative nationwide campaign to get staff in councils across the UK more active. Since its launch in February, more than 30 councils have taken part in a challenge. Collectively, teams have taken over 9 million steps on their office stairs and burned a staggering 700,000 calories to improve their health.

Many London based local authorities have taken part in the initiative including Brent, Greenwich, Lewisham and Harrow Council. Brent Council took a starring role in the first challenge and took close to a million steps to help reach the summit of Everest. Following the challenge, Lauren Ensor, Public Health Advisor at Brent Council commented “I’m very proud of everyone’s efforts at Brent. We’ve got people participating who have gone from never taking the stairs to totally stopping using the lifts and enjoying it!”.

The success of the pioneering national initiative has been twofold. As well as providing gentle competition and engagement, those who took part reported real health benefits. StepJockey surveyed all players who took part in the challenges to get a deeper understanding of what they thought and the results were impressive. 68% of participants said they felt healthier following the four-week challenge and more than 70% said they now use the stairs more frequently.



92%

of people either  
'loved' or 'liked'  
the challenge



68%

felt healthier  
as a result of  
taking part



72%

are now using  
the stairs more  
frequently



90%

want their  
organisation to run  
another challenge

The fact remains that the sedentary epidemic is growing around the world and the problems faced by leaders in public health are broad and complex. Encouraging simple, low impact activity throughout the day cannot be underestimated and providing simple stair climbing nudges and incentives is a powerful way to achieve a significant health boost.

## About the Author:

Josh Wildeman is the Communications Lead at StepJockey and specialises in helping large organisations launch workplace stair climbing challenges to improve their health. Josh has worked with the likes of Disney, Channel 4 and The Wellcome Trust to encourage hundreds of staff to get more active at work and feel a little healthier everyday.

For further information, take a look at the [StepJockey website](#) to see how they're helping organisation around the world get more active and healthy.

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