



Government backed start-up to fight obesity by labelling schools and colleges for calorie burn

Sept 2013



A new start-up has been launched that aims to tackle obesity and promote fitness by labelling the stairs of the world for calorie burn.

The idea is grounded in behavioural economics and is particularly effective in helping children, students and teachers build more physical activity into their daily lives.

Evidence-based, and backed by the Department of Health, StepJockey is a great way to reach those most at risk of physical inactivity, including the increasing number of young people in the UK who do not achieve the daily recommended levels of physical activity.

The StepJockey website allows any set of stairs to be mapped and rated for calorie burn in moments. Once stairs are rated, you can print off a set of FREE smart posters immediately or order a set of smart signs with NFC. All StepJockey smart posters and signs can be read by the StepJockey app allowing users and schools to track and 'gamify' their performance.

StepJockey is founded by Helen Nuki, a behavioural economics expert and mother of four, who had the idea after her seven-year-old daughter, Litzzi, wondered why official signs, "Only tell you about the things that are bad for you".

"StepJockey is about looking at the positive and promoting fitness for everyone a little bit at a time", says Helen.



“We tell people how many calories are in food but we don’t tell them where they can burn them off. Through StepJockey, we are offering the opportunity to put that right”.

“The world is a gym and through StepJockey we aim to positively label it as such”.

It takes just one person to rate a set of stairs – student accommodation or a university campus, say – to have a positive impact on everyone who uses that building.

In trials involving more than 250,000 stair/lift journeys, stair climbing increased by up to 29% when the building was equipped with StepJockey smart signs. When people were able to track their stair climbing, stair use jumped by over 500%. According to Professor Alan Batterham, Professor in Exercise at Teesside University, and an advisor to StepJockey, stair climbing is a surprisingly powerful form of exercise. It has benefits that go beyond weight loss.

“Building a vigorous physical activity like stair climbing into your daily routine is an excellent, time-efficient way to help increase your fitness and control your weight,” said Professor Batterham. “You also reduce your risk of chronic diseases including cardiovascular disease, diabetes, osteoporosis, and breast and colon cancers.”

StepJockey’s NFC enabled smart signs allow StepJockey to fit seamlessly into the built environment and daily urban life, making it easy to reach those too busy to exercise or anyone who might be embarrassed to go to the gym. It also helps people to start to understand how much physical activity is needed to burn off the calories they eat.

From mid-September, anyone with a smartphone will be able to track their progress using the free StepJockey app, downloadable from the App store and Google Play.

StepJockey is available to universities, schools and accommodation providers, who want to build the initiative into their existing health and wellbeing plans for students.

To get started organisations can download free posters or order smart signs online at www.stepjockey.com. Alternatively they can arrange a full site survey including the design and manufacture of bespoke, co-branded signs.

Notes for editors

Research and evidence

- In the trial the presence of signs significantly increased stair usage, with upward stair journeys increasing by up to 29%
- The most influenced by the intervention were people who were overweight (BMI over 25), infrequent takers of physical activity and women.
- When individuals were able to track and compare their progress stair usage increased five-fold.
- 92% of new stair climbers said it would become a habit.
- University College London’s Institute of Child Health¹, recorded the activity of 6,500 youngsters for a week. Researchers found just 51% of the 6,500 children they monitored achieved the recommended hour of physical activity each day. For girls, the figure was just 38%, compared with 63% for boys. The study was published in the online journal BMJ Open, found levels of activity varied among groups.



Key research findings on stair climbing and health can be found at <https://www.stepjockey.com/science>

Research background on inactivity in children from University College London's Institute of Child Health report: <http://www.ucl.ac.uk/ich/ich-news/aug-13/article69>

StepJockey benefits:

- An effective and affordable way to promote health throughout schools, colleges and universities
- Improves lecturer and student engagement and productivity
- Unlike other wellness plans, does not require active participation to benefit all
- Clearly signals to all that you value a healthy environment
- Reduces lift congestion, carbon emissions and improved fire safety
- An evidence-based way of increasing physical activity at a population level cheaply
- Especially effective among overweight groups and the less active
- A simple intervention to prescribe centrally and pass on for local level implementation

Stair climbing facts:

1. Stair climbing requires 8-9 times more energy expenditure than sitting and about 7 times more energy than taking a lift. Per minute, stair climbing burns more calories than jogging
2. You burn about 0.1 calories for every step you climb, so you burn roughly a calorie for every 10 upward steps
3. You also burn calories going down. Every stair descended burns about 0.05 calories, so you burn 1 calorie for every 20 steps down
4. Just 7 minutes stair climbing a day has been estimated to more than half the risk of a heart attack over 10 years
5. And perhaps best of all, the heavier you are the more calories you burn when stair climbing

Case study

Jane, a university lecturer, is 45 years old, weighs 75kg and is 172 cms tall and commutes to her job in a large university in central London each day. She climbs up and down the stairs in Elephant and Castle tube station once a day and climbs up and down the stairs in her four-storey department building in Victoria twice a day. Overall she burns an extra 76.5 calories per day by climbing the stairs. This equates to 17,595 calories per year (based on 230 working days in the year), which is equivalent to 8.5 days of food or 2.3kg of fat. Perhaps most important of all, the extra exercise moves her into the safe BMI range.

About StepJockey

The StepJockey initiative is backed by the Department of Health via the Small Business Research Initiative, a government scheme which promotes innovation in areas that bring public benefits.

For more information, images and media kit go to: www.stepjockey.com or contact Nina Whitby on 07870 279 521 or 0203 397 8377. Alternatively send an email to nina.whitby@stepjockey.com