

## Workplace Wellness: Why Promote Wellness

### What is Workplace Wellness?

Workplace wellness refers to the education and activities that a worksite may do to promote healthy lifestyles to employees and their families. Examples of wellness programming include such things as health education classes, subsidized use of fitness facilities, internal policies that promote healthy behavior, and any other activities, policies or environmental changes that affect the health of employees. Wellness programs can be simple or complex. Many programs require a minimal investment of time and money. More substantial programs often use more resources, but the many benefits to supporting and encouraging employee health and safety outweigh the costs.

### Why Workplace Wellness?

**It affects your company's bottom line in many ways.** Here are three key factors:

- Decreased healthcare costs
- Increased productivity
- Better morale

Rising healthcare benefit costs are a significant concern and poor health habits and unnecessary medical care costs consume portions of our corporate resources as well as the employee paycheck. The worksite is an ideal setting for health promotion and disease prevention programs. Employees spend many of their waking hours at work, nearing 50 hours per week on average. That is why the workplace is an ideal setting to address health and wellness issues.

### Why Start a Company Wellness Program?

**Wellness programs help control costs.** An investment in your employees' health may lower healthcare costs or slow the increase in providing that important benefit. In fact, employees with more risk factors, including being overweight, smoking and having diabetes, cost more to insure and pay more for health care than people with fewer risk factors.

An employee wellness program can raise awareness so employees with fewer risk factors remain in a lower-cost group. A program also can encourage employees with health risk factors to make lifestyle changes to improve their quality of life and lower costs. The payoff in dollars as well as in quality of life can have a big impact on your company's bottom line.

**Healthier employees are more productive.** This has been demonstrated in factory settings and in office environments in which workers with workplace wellness initiatives miss less work. Presenteeism, in which employees are physically present on the job but are not at their most productive or effective, is reduced in workplaces that have wellness programs.

**Healthier employees miss less work.** Companies that support wellness and healthy decisions have a greater percentage of employees at work every day. Because health frequently carries over into better family choices, your employees may miss less work caring for ill family members as well. The cost savings of providing a wellness program can be measured against reduced overtime to cover absent employees and other aspects of absenteeism.

**Improve morale and enhanced image for the organization.** A company that cares about its employees' health is often seen as a better place to work. Those companies save money by retaining workers who appreciate the benefit of a wellness program and they can attract new employees in a competitive market.

## **Workplace Wellness: Low-Cost Activities That Work**

Workplace wellness programs that support employees and the environment that they work in have been shown to be a good return on investment. Workplace wellness programs can be extensive and sometimes expensive. However, there are ways for small employers to make positive changes at little or no cost.

### **Program Activities**

#### **Nutrition Activities**

##### Fruit and Vegetable Consumption

1. Provide healthy eating reminders and prompts to employees via multiple means (i.e. e-mail, posters, payroll stuffers, etc.).
2. Offer appealing, low-cost fruits and vegetables in vending machines and in the cafeteria.
3. Provide cookbooks, food preparation, and cooking classes for employees' families.
4. Ensure onsite cafeterias follow healthy cooking practices and set nutritional standards for foods served that align with the U.S. Dietary Guidelines for Americans.
5. Offer healthy foods at meetings, conferences, and catered events.
6. Use point-of-decision prompts as a marketing technique to promote healthier choices.
7. Provide healthy cooking demonstrations that teach skills (i.e. fruit and vegetable selection and preparation).
8. Provide taste-testing opportunities at the workplace.
9. Offer employee-led campaigns, demonstrations or programs.
10. Offer local fruits and vegetables at the workplace (i.e. workplace farmer's market or community-supported agriculture drop-off point).
11. Use competitive pricing (price non-nutritious foods in vending machines and cafeterias at higher prices).
12. Provide protected time and dedicated space away from the work area for breaks and lunch.
13. Make kitchen equipment available to employees.
14. Provide an opportunity for onsite gardening if possible.

##### Sweetened Beverage Consumption

1. Make water available throughout the day.
2. Offer appealing, low-cost healthful drink options in vending machines and the cafeteria.
3. Modify worksite vending contracts to increase the number of healthy options.
4. Price non-nutritious beverages at a higher cost.
5. Use point-of-decision prompts to promote healthier choices.

### Portion Control

1. Label foods to show serving size and/or nutritional content.
2. Provide food models, food scales for weighing and pictures to help employees assess portion size.
3. Offer appropriate portion sizes at meetings, workplace events and in the cafeteria.

### **Physical/Weight Management Activities**

1. Allow access to on- and off- worksite gyms and recreational activities before, during, and after work hours.
2. Offer and encourage participation in after work recreation or leagues.
3. Provide cash incentives or reduced insurance costs for participation in physical activity and/or weight management or maintenance activities.
4. Provide shower and/or changing facilities onsite.
5. Provide outdoor exercise areas such as fields and trails for employee use.
6. Provide bicycle racks in safe, convenient, and accessible locations.
7. Offer onsite fitness opportunities, such as group classes or personal training.
8. Provide an onsite exercise facility.
9. Set up programs that have strong social support systems and incentives, such as:
  - Buddy or team physical activity goals
  - Programs that involve workers and family
  - Programs to encourage physical activity, such as pedometer walking challenges
  - Explore discounted or subsidized memberships at local health clubs, recreation centers, or YMCAs
10. Offer flexible work hours to allow for physical activity during the day.
11. Support physical activity breaks during the workday, such as stretching or walking.
12. Host walk-and-talk meetings.
13. Map out onsite trails or nearby walking routes and destinations.
14. Have employees map out their own biking or walking route to and from work.
15. Post motivational signs at elevators and escalators to encourage stair usage.
16. Provide exercise/physical fitness messages and information to employees.
17. Provide or support recreation leagues and other physical activity events onsite or in the community.
18. Start employee activity clubs such as walking or bicycling clubs.
19. Provide onsite child care facilities to facilitate physical activity.
20. Sponsor a bike to work day and reward employees who participate.
21. Set up a box and solicit fitness and health tips.

### **General Health Education Activities**

1. Have a current policy outlining the requirements and functions of a comprehensive workplace wellness program.
2. Have a wellness plan in place that addresses the purpose, nature, duration, resources required, participants in, and expected results of a workplace wellness program.
3. Orient employees to the wellness program and give them copies of the physical activity, nutrition, and tobacco use policies.
4. Promote and encourage employee participation in the physical activity/fitness and nutrition education/weight management program.

5. Provide health education information to employees.
6. Have a committee that meets at least once a month to oversee the wellness program.
7. Offer regular health education presentations on various physical activity, nutrition, and wellness-related topics. Ask voluntary health associations, healthcare providers, and/or public health agencies to offer onsite education classes.
8. Host a health fair as a kick-off event or as a celebration for completion of a wellness campaign.
9. Designate specific areas to support employees such as diabetics and nursing mothers.
10. Conduct preventive wellness screenings for blood pressure, body composition, blood cholesterol, and diabetes.
11. Provide confidential health risk appraisals.
12. Offer onsite weight management/maintenance programs for employees.
13. Add weight management/maintenance, nutrition, and physical activity counseling as a member benefit in health insurance contracts.

### **Tobacco Cessation**

1. Establish a company policy prohibiting tobacco use anywhere on the property.
2. Provide prompts/posters to support no tobacco use policy.
3. Policy supporting participation in smoking cessation activities during duty time (flex-time).
4. Provide counseling through an individual, group, or telephone counseling program onsite.
5. Provide counseling through a health plan sponsored individual, group, or telephone counseling program.
6. Provide cessation medications through health insurance.

Adapted in part from *Wisconsin Worksite Wellness Resource Kit*. This article is not intended to be exhaustive nor should any discussion or opinions be construed as legal advice. Readers should contact legal counsel for legal advice.

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