

Benefits of a Workplace Wellness Program

The overall health of workers is influenced by many factors, both at work and outside. These factors can include stress both at home and at work, physical and chemical exposures, imbalances caused from poor diet and limited exercise, smoking, hypertension and alcohol use. The effects of these influences cannot be divided between at work and non-work. Most adults spend more time each day at work than anywhere else. The workplace can be a powerful influence on employee behavior. The work place is a convenient and valuable venue to provide important services to a worthy population, resulting in overall health improvement.

BENEFITS TO EMPLOYEES

- Improved physical fitness
- Lower levels of stress
- Reduced work absences
- Reduced medical costs
- Increased morale due to management's interest in their health and well being leading to increased self-image and self esteem
- Weight reduction

BENEFITS TO EMPLOYERS

- Increased worker morale
- Increased worker productivity
- Reduced healthcare costs
- Decreased rates of illness and injuries
- Reduced employee absenteeism

- Enhanced recruitment and retention of healthy employees

A U.S. Department of Health and Human Services report in 2002 revealed that at worksites with physical activity programs, employers have:

- Reduced healthcare costs by 20 to 55 percent
- Reduced short-term sick leave by 6 to 32 percent
- Increased productivity by 2 to 52 percent.

As our life span increases, it's important to consider the quality as well. If that is to remain high so that we can fully enjoy these extra years, we must practice good eating habits, be active and refrain from using tobacco products.

ELEMENTS OF AN EFFECTIVE WELLNESS PROGRAM

In order to achieve real improvement, you first need to set goals and devise a reasonable strategy for reaching them. As a minimum, the following steps should be considered:

- Gain management support
- Create a wellness team
- Assess needs and interests
- Develop a plan
- Create a supportive workplace
- Evaluate

Contact your Safety and Health consultant for assistance.

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DEVELOPING A WELLNESS PROGRAM

Organization Culture and Leadership

- Top Management must support the program. Meaningful change will only occur if driven from the top.
- An individual or team should be assigned to oversee the program. The size of this will be determined by your number of employees.
- Engage mid-level management and supervisors. These individuals are the direct links between the workers and upper management. They are the ones who will determine if the program succeeds or fails.

PROGRAM DESIGN

- Establish clear principles to focus priorities, guide the program and direct resource allocation. Prevention of disease and injury supports worker health and well being.
- Eliminate recognized occupational hazards as a fundamental principle of improving the safety of the work environment.
- Tailor the program to the specific workplace and the diverse needs of your workers. Workplaces vary in size, sector, product, location, and worker characteristics such as age, physical and mental abilities, education, cultural background and health practices.
- Adjust the program as needed to assure of its success. The relationship between work and health can be complex. The consequences of change may be unforeseen, so the program must be evaluated to detect unanticipated effects and adjusted based on the experiences.
- Make sure the program takes a long term outlook to assure sustainability. Your program must be aligned with the core product/values of the enterprise.
- Be sure the program meets regulatory requirement such as HIPAA, ADA. If workers believe their information is not kept confidential, the program is less likely to succeed.

- Conduct employee health assessments or screenings. These health screenings can include cholesterol, mammograms, skin cancer screenings and blood pressure. This information can also be used to establish a weight loss benchmark.
- Your plan and goals should be simple. If smoking is a concern, the wellness team might set a goal of "In three months we will cut the number of smokers by 25%."
- Choose the appropriate methods for providing information. This could be giving information on proper nutrition, signs on vending machines encouraging healthy choices and providing nutritional information in the company cafeteria.
- Create an environment that makes it easier for employees to participate. Make it easier to exercise more during the workday. Walking trails or "department walks" are a good way to get employees to participate on a regular basis.
- Offer classes to employees on proper stretching, exercising and suitable activities. Consider offering workout classes.
- Personal consultations and lifestyle coaching can be a good follow-up to the initial employee screenings. Private consultation can make sure employees are on the right track.

PROGRAM EVALUATION

- Measure the results. If the goals are not reached, it may be necessary to change the interventions or make the environment more supportive.
- Adjust or modify the program based on both the results and employee feedback.

The key to a successful program is to make it simple and inexpensive for your employees. One company purchased \$5 pedometers for all their employees and encouraged them to take 10,000 steps a day.

Contact your Safety and Health consultant for assistance.