

Workplace Wellness



Workplace Wellness: Why Promote Wellness?

According to a 2013 Workplace Wellness Programs study by the RAND Corporation, about half of U.S. employers offer wellness initiatives. These programs may include wellness screenings, interventions and more complex programs.

What Is Workplace Wellness?

Workplace wellness refers to the education and activities that a worksite may sponsor to promote healthy lifestyles for employees and their families. Examples of wellness initiatives 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.

Do Wellness Programs Really Work?

When sponsoring a wellness program, the main hurdle to success is engaging your employees in the program. According to RAND's wellness study, slightly less than half of employees participated in simple wellness programs such as clinical screenings or completing health risk assessments. The benefits of wellness programs can only be realized if a significant number of your employees take part in the efforts.

Why Workplace Wellness?

Wellness affects your company's bottom line in many ways—in particular, it can lower health care costs, increase productivity, decrease absenteeism and raise employee morale. Because employees spend many of their waking hours at work, the workplace is an ideal setting to address health and wellness issues. The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) promotes the formation of workplace wellness programs because, according to one of its studies, employees in companies with "a strong culture of health" are three times as likely to actively strive to improve their health. There are numerous benefits to workplace wellness when employees see the value and participate.

Control costs. Health care costs are a significant portion of a company's budget, so strategically targeting this expense can benefit an employer's bottom line. An investment in your employees' health may lower health care costs or slow the cost increases. Employees with more health 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. A wellness program

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can help employees with high risk factors make lifestyle changes to improve their quality of life and lower costs, while also helping employees with fewer risk factors remain healthy.

More productive employees. Research shows that workplaces with wellness programs have employees who are more productive at work.

Less missed work. Healthier employees mean fewer sick days, which is another benefit companies generally achieve through wellness programs. Plus, employees' healthier behavior may translate into better family choices, so employees may also miss less work caring for ill family members. Reduced absenteeism can yield significant cost savings and return on your wellness investment.

Reduced workers' compensation and disability costs. Employees who make healthy changes and lower their health risk factors often have a reduced chance of a workplace injury or illness or a disability. In both cases, this can save the employer money, not just on insurance premiums and benefits paid out, but also on the replacement cost of recruiting and training a new worker to replace one who is out of work for health reasons.

Higher morale and improved recruiting. A company that cares about its employees' health is often seen as a better place to work, and wellness programs can attract top talent in a competitive market. In addition, expressing a commitment to your employees' health can improve employee morale and strengthen retention. Employees can experience many potential benefits after joining a wellness program, including:

- Increased well-being, improved self-image and higher self-esteem
- Improved coping skills with stress or other health factors
- Reduced risk for developing chronic or life-threatening conditions
- Increased motivation to improve health
- Improved overall health
- Lower costs for health care (fewer doctor visits, lower premiums, less need for expensive care, etc.)
- Access to needed social support, as co-workers also strive toward healthier lifestyles
- Improved job satisfaction
- Safer and more productive work environment

Employees who experience these positive changes and benefits will often feel more loyalty to the company and be more grateful for the company's commitment to their health.