

The Facts About Employee Wellness

Rates of overweight and obesity among Americans have skyrocketed over the past decade. Employee wellness programs are one more way to affect this negative trend. Research supports the fact that employee wellness programs that promote increased physical activity, among other healthy lifestyle changes, do make a difference. The benefits are numerous and not only positively impact employees, but can also impact employers and their bottom lines.

- Most of the ten leading causes of premature deaths in the U.S. are in some way linked to personal behaviors, such as smoking, inactivity, poor diet, and alcoholism, among others. (CDC, 2003)
- We spend over \$1 trillion a year on healthcare in the U.S., but only 5% of that is spent on public health, and only a fraction of that is spent on health promotion. (AHJP, Vol. 15, No. 5, 2001)
- According to the Wellness Councils of America, more than 89% of businesses have some form of health promotion program – the most popular being exercise, smoking cessation classes, back care programs, and stress management. (AJHP, Vol 13, No. 6, 1999)
- Approximately 237 million people are enrolled in health care plans in the U.S. Of these:
 - Employers provide coverage for 68%
 - Medicare or Medicaid cover 23%
 - Only 9% are self-pay or self-insured
- In 1998, an in depth evaluation of eight employee health promotion programs showed an average reduction of \$3.35 for every dollar spent on health promotion. (The Art of Health Promotion, 1998)
- In one study, members of a Travelers fitness center were absent from work significantly fewer days than nonmembers and in another four year study, sick leave was reduced 19%. (WELCOA, 1999)
- At DuPont, each dollar invested in workplace health promotion yielded \$1.42 in lower absenteeism costs over a 2 year period. (American Journal of Public Health, September, 1990)
- Johnson and Johnson reduced their absenteeism rate by 15% within two years of introducing their wellness program. They also cut their hospital costs by 34% after just three years. (Human Resources Executive, April 1993)
- A study in the May, 2004 issue of the *Journal of Occupational and Environmental Medicine* found that employees who engaged in moderate physical activity of at least 1 to 2 times a week paid \$250 less in health care costs annually than sedentary employees who didn't exercise at all.

- Employees who are engaged in health promoting habits are less likely to develop the chronic conditions of coronary heart disease, stroke, lung cancer, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, and diabetes that account for 44.7% of all causes of death in Florida. (Vital Statistics, 2001)
- A two-year study to compare employee attitudes at companies participating in a comprehensive health promotion program found significant changes in attitudes toward organizational commitment, supervision, working conditions, job competence, job security, and pay and fringe benefits. (Journal of Occupational Medicine, 1990)
- The Cost of Unhealthy Employees to American Business:
 - It costs an average of \$1300 more per year for an employee who smokes.
 - Workplace alcohol, tobacco, and drug use costs over \$100 billion each year.
 - Job stress is estimated to cost \$200-300 billion dollars annually.
 - At least 100 million work days are lost each year to lower back pain, costing employers about \$20 billion.

(Source: Six Reasons Why Health Promotion Makes Good Business Sense)