



Engaging Your Staff in Corporate Wellness Programs

MANAGEMENT CONNECTION



Corporate wellness programs encourage healthier choices, increase morale, and improve productivity

From burnt-out employees to poor productivity to rising healthcare costs, it's a challenging time to manage a foodservice operation. Fortunately, there is a surprising initiative that may help with all of these concerns: a corporate wellness program.

Because foodservice staff spends most of their week at their job, employers are in a unique position to drive a culture of health and wellness. Not only do corporate wellness programs encourage healthier choices for the employees' benefit, but they also lead to better morale, improved productivity, and sometimes even reduced healthcare costs for your organization.

THE CURRENT STATE OF EMPLOYEE HEALTH

Currently, six in 10 Americans suffer from a chronic disease, a leading driver in healthcare costs. Looking at heart disease and stroke alone, it's estimated that these two issues are responsible for approximately \$190 billion in healthcare costs and \$126 billion in lost productivity. And with an increasingly aging population – many of whom are still in the workforce – these costs are only expected to rise.

Many chronic diseases are attributable to modifiable risk factors such as diet, exercise, weight, and smoking status.



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By helping employees address these lifestyle choices, your company can reduce the risk of chronic diseases among employees, potentially controlling healthcare costs.

Obesity is a prime example of such a risk factor. Currently, 39 percent of adults in our country are obese. That's staggering on its own, but here's why employers should take note: An analysis in the *American Journal of Health Promotion* found that employees who were obese cost *twice* as much in medical, sick, disability, and worker's compensation costs compared to employees who were of normal weight.

BENEFITS OF CORPORATE WELLNESS PROGRAMS

It's obvious that reduced healthcare costs are a primary driver for corporate wellness programs. The U.S. Chamber of Commerce evaluated workplace wellness return on investment, and concluded that a well-designed program led to a savings of \$1.50 to \$3 per dollar spent.

But for foodservice employers, many non-benefited part-time employees coupled with a high turnover ratio means you may not see the same

savings on healthcare costs. Is corporate wellness still worth it?

The answer is a resounding *yes*. Numerous other benefits include:

- **Reduced absenteeism.** One mid-size company found their program saved approximately \$60 per person on absenteeism costs, for a total of more than \$8,000 in savings on this factor alone.
- **Better productivity.** Even simple programming – like 10-minute physical activity breaks—has been shown to increase productivity.
- **Higher job satisfaction.** Research has connected workplace wellness with higher job satisfaction, lower stress, and lower exhaustion levels.
- **Increased presenteeism.** Conditions like back pain, anxiety, headaches, and depression all can contribute to decreased presenteeism at work. In other words, even when employees are there, they are not as productive or engaged. Programs that address both physical and mental health can improve presenteeism.

DEVELOPING YOUR CORPORATE WELLNESS PROGRAM

Use these steps to develop a new program, or further engage employees in one that's already in place.

1) Assess what your employees—and company—want.

Workplace wellness should both satisfy a company's needs (for lower healthcare costs, improved productivity, etc.), as well as engage employees to improve their own health. As such, it's important to assess programming from both angles.

At the company level, consider the challenges specific to food service. For example, there may be a limited number of total employees, or a high proportion of non-benefited employees—both of which can make it difficult to offer onsite services in a cost-effective manner.

Consider meeting with human resources to discuss your goals and ideas. Ask about any initiatives that are already in place, and ways that you could engage your employees in these. If there are no programs in place, ask if there might be budgetary support available to begin one.

Continued on page 8

Alternatively, consider focusing on your own programming within the department, rather than organization-wide. While this may seem like an enormous undertaking, there are plenty of easy-to-implement, inexpensive approaches.

From the employee angle, generational differences and varying levels of health/fitness present challenges in finding universally enjoyable activities. Try providing surveys or conducting focus groups to gauge interest in different programming, and lean towards cost-effective activities with the largest support.

2) Develop a plan.

Based on the data gathered above, consider these three categories of activities you might implement:

- **Awareness activities.** Generally screenings or health risk assessments, these activities are designed to bring awareness of current personal health status. For example, an employee may realize they have high blood pressure or that they are overweight.

- **Educational programming.** This category focuses on improving the employee's knowledge of a particular health topic, such as a lunch-and-learn session on healthy snack choices or a poster about the benefits of meditation.
- **Behavior change interventions.** These provide actionable steps and support to change an employee's behavior—like a Couch to 5K® running program to improve fitness, or a six-week weight loss program with a dietitian to improve body mass index (BMI).

In your plan, detail your budget for any activities and who will lead them. Think creatively! Do you have interns or students rotating through the kitchen that could help with program development? Do you have an employee who is passionate about wellness that could generate excitement among others?

Remember that corporate wellness does not have to be a full-scale year-long program that costs hundreds of thousands of dollars. It can be simple, small activities!

Continued on page 10

25 IDEAS

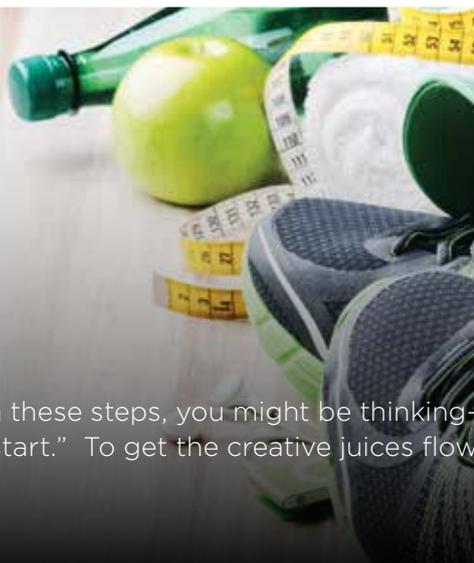
for Corporate Wellness Activities

Nutrition Initiatives

1. Host a healthy recipe swap, where employees bring in their favorite recipes to share. Compile a digital "recipe book" with all the suggestions and send this out to your employees.
2. Find a local farm to partner with for a CSA (community supported agriculture) program. Many local farms are willing to deliver these produce boxes directly on-site if there is enough interest from employees.
3. Provide reusable water bottles that encourage employees to drink enough water each day.
4. Do your employees typically eat meals on-site? Develop a list of nutritious options they can choose from.
5. Ask if your registered dietitian is available to offer your staff a grocery store tour. This can help employees feel more confident in planning their own nutritious choices.
6. Host nutrition-focused holiday events for your staff. For example, you might have a dark chocolate taste test in February for Valentine's Day, and do a short in-service about polyphenols in chocolate.

Fitness Initiatives

7. Reach out to gyms or personal training studios to see if they can offer a discount for your employees.
8. Try "walking meetings" when possible, rather than an office meeting. This is best for a one-on-one or small group chats which are not negative or serious in nature.
9. Lead (or hire a running coach to lead) a Couch to 5K® program after work. This popular program helps people train to run a 5K in just nine weeks.



Now that you're familiar with these steps, you might be thinking—"this sounds great, but I don't even know where to start." To get the creative juices flowing, here are 25 different workplace wellness ideas:

10. Hire a group fitness instructor to provide a few on-site classes directly after working hours. Consider your audience when deciding what to offer. Is it mostly athletic folks that would enjoy a tough boot camp? Or would a gentle yoga class be more your staff's style?
11. Install bike stands for employees who are interested in cycling to work.
12. Encourage employees to take a one-minute stretch break at the top of each hour.
13. Start a walking club before work. Interested employees can meet a half hour before their shift starts, and walk a one-mile route around the facility.

Stress Management Initiatives

14. Hang a poster in the breakroom that includes different yoga stretches which can be done in work clothing.
15. Offer regular reminders about any employee assistance program (EAP) benefits that your company offers.
16. Offer a 10-minute guided meditation for employees during a slow time. You can use an app like Headspace to help with this.
17. If you have a massage school in your area, see if they offer discounted or free massages for students who need to get practice hours. You can refer your employees to these inexpensive resources for some post-work relaxation.
18. Host a roundtable on time management and productivity, as both of these are reasons that employees tend to feel stressed out. Identify any concerns that employees have, and encourage everyone to come up with creative solutions. Take a look at things you could do as a certified dietary manager to address these concerns.

General Health Initiatives

19. Host an employee health fair. Recruit benefits providers like your health insurance company and vision company to share more about what they offer. Invite outside vendors to participate as well - like local gyms that can offer free day passes, banks that may help employees with financial wellness, and healthy food companies that can provide tastings.
20. Provide yearly on-site health screenings for BMI, blood pressure, cholesterol, and glucose.
21. Hire professionals (or recruit them from your own facility) to come in and conduct "lunch and learn" programs for your employees. These can address topics like nutrition, chronic disease prevention, fitness, and more.
22. Offer help with smoking cessation. According to the American Lung Association, employers can save approximately \$6,000 per year for each employee that quits smoking. Most health insurance programs provide some form of employee smoking cessation support, and there are other ready-to-implement programs available through organizations like the American Lung Association.
23. Create a wellness bulletin board where you can share health information on one half, and have employees tack up post-its with their own goals on the other half.
24. Develop a list of helpful health-related apps to share with your employees. For example: MyFitnessPal (for tracking food), Strava (for tracking fitness activities), and HeadSpace (for meditation).
25. Working with employees that are trying to lose weight? Try a "5 in 5" program—encouraging employees to lose five pounds in five weeks. Offer incentives for anyone who meets the goal.

3) Promote engagement.

Once you implement your plan, it's time to make sure people participate! Be sure to communicate information regularly about the wellness programming through on-site signage and/or email campaigns.

In addition, consider incentives if a budget is available—these typically increase engagement. For example, incentives have been shown to increase participation in health risk screenings and physical activity events.

4) Conduct regular monitoring and evaluation.

Like any good program, it's important to regularly assess effectiveness.

Process evaluation can be conducted during programming by monitoring participation, employee feedback, and any challenges to implementation.

After a particular initiative is completed, outcomes evaluation should be conducted to assess change—like knowledge improvements, different

behaviors, or health improvements. You might use surveys or screening tools depending on what you are trying to assess.

If you are working on a large-scale program in conjunction with HR, they may complete a more comprehensive evaluation surrounding participation, changes in health risk, and ROI and cost data.

of time or money. However, it's promising that this could lead to reduced healthcare premiums down the line for long-term, full-time employees. In the interim, and for short-term or part-time employees, there are immediate benefits like enhanced productivity, reduced absenteeism, and improved morale. These all create a better corporate culture and more positive work environment. **E**

THE BOTTOM LINE

Corporate wellness programs do require a bit of an upfront investment, whether that be in the form

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This Level II article assumes that the reader has a foundation of basic concepts of the topic. The desired outcome is to enhance knowledge and facilitate application of knowledge to practice.

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- Currently, ____ in 10 Americans suffer from a chronic disease, a leading driver in healthcare costs.
 - 3
 - 4
 - 6
- According to the *American Journal of Health Promotion*, employees who are obese cost _____ in medical, sick, disability, and worker’s compensation costs compared to employees of normal weight.
 - The same
 - Twice as much
 - Four times as much
- Research from the U.S. Chamber of Commerce indicates that a well-designed corporate wellness program has what ROI (return on investment) range?
 - \$0.25 to \$0.50 per dollar spent
 - \$1.50 to \$3.00 per dollar spent
 - \$6.00 to \$7.00 per dollar spent
- _____ interventions are focused on actionable steps to modify an employee’s behavior. It includes activities like a weight loss program with an RD or 5K running challenge.
 - Awareness
 - Educational
 - Behavior change
- Which type of evaluation is conducted during workplace wellness programming to assess participation, employee feedback, and challenges to implementation?
 - Process
 - Outcomes
 - Standard
- One example of a workplace wellness nutrition initiative might be a CSA program. What does this entail?
 - Produce boxes from a local farm
 - RD-based educational program
 - Hydration initiative
- According to the American Lung Association, how much can employers save for each employee that quits smoking?
 - \$4,000
 - \$6,000
 - \$10,000

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