



# Health Matters

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## Putting Wellness to Work for Your Employees

Creating a healthy work environment is good business.

These days, medical costs can put a significant pinch on the purse strings. Some estimates suggest that one-half or more of your earnings will go toward the care of your employees. That's why developing creative health promotion activities that help contain costs and align with your business priorities is one of the hottest trends in health care.

Across the country a growing number of employers are establishing on-site health promotion programs to keep their employees healthy and help them stave off costly diseases later in their tenure. Research shows healthy employees get sick less often, miss fewer days of work, and have fewer workers' compensation claims. They're also likely to stay on the job longer.

So, is smoking a problem in your work force? Are many of your employees overweight? In the coming months I'll share insights on how to make health promotion programs work for you – from garnering senior management support and developing incentives to measuring the success of your programs.

One of the most popular tactics is an on-site health screening, which provides information about cholesterol, glucose and carbon monoxide levels, and body mass index. This window into the health of your staff can also cast light on potential health risks that may become costly in the future. Other popular strategies include weekly walking programs, weight loss competitions and fitness center memberships. You may choose to restock the company cafeteria and vending machines with healthier fare or sign up your company for health coaching services, which can provide motivational techniques to help your employees beat addictions and learn new behaviors.

Winning the support of top managers is vital for a successful program. You'll need their backing when it comes to funding new programs, giving time off to exercise at lunch, or offering incentives. And of course you'll need to determine the level of interest of your employees. Sending the message that you care about their health will motivate, improve morale and save money.

So protect your most valuable resource. Making an investment in human capital is one of the best ways to improve your bottom line.

### First Step to a Healthier Staff

You're ready to build a healthy work force. But is your work force ready?

Before launching a health promotion program it's important to gauge employee interest with a survey. A multiple-choice questionnaire conducted electronically or in written form can shed light on their expectations and limitations. Will your employees give up all or part of their lunch hour to exercise? What incentives would encourage them to participate in a smoking cessation program? You'll discover whether an early morning yoga class or weekly walking program would inspire them to get fit.

Below are some questions to consider asking your employees before introducing a health promotion campaign.

- What health topics interest you?
- Where do you get your health news?
- How do you like to receive information about health topics at work?
- What is the ideal length of time for a work health promotion activity?
- What is the best time of day to participate in a health promotion activity?
- What are some reasons why you may not participate in these types of activities? \*

### The Hidden Costs of Illness

Employers may be surprised to discover just how expensive poor health can be. According to the Centers for Disease Control:

- It costs an average of \$1,300 per year for an employee who smokes.
- Workplace alcohol, tobacco, and other drug use costs American companies more than \$100 billion each year.
- Job stress is estimated to cost American industry \$200 to \$300 billion each year.
- At least 100 million workdays are lost each year to low back pain, at a cost to employers of about \$20 billion.

Source: The Wellness Councils of America

For more information on health promotion programs, visit [www.upmchealthplan.com](http://www.upmchealthplan.com) or contact Michael Taylor at 412/454-7534.