



Developing a Wellness Program: Employer involvement makes a difference

I. Introduction

Studies show that wellness initiatives at work can lead to greater productivity, lower absenteeism, fewer high-dollar claims and longer, happier lives for your employees. Regardless of size, all organizations can benefit from these programs.

Here are a few suggestions to help you create a successful wellness program for your organization:

- **Appoint a wellness team to oversee the effort.** For a small company, this might be one individual.
- **Create a starting point.** You can't change what you can't measure; so choose a way to measure the "before." For example, have your employees complete a wellness assessment through one of Well Informed's online support programs. This is a good way for your employees to document a starting point in their efforts.
- **Have a simple plan and set simple goals.** If unhealthy eating, inactivity and stress are identified as your primary concerns, then your wellness team might say, "Over the next four weeks, we'll challenge each employee to walk 15 minutes each day, replace one 'bad' food each week with a 'good' one and do a daily stress-relieving activity together as a team." Or you may tie participation to completing online wellness assessments or enrollment in lifestyle improvement programs available through Well Informed.
- **Choose the appropriate intervention.** There are several options here, including (but not limited to):
 - Providing information on healthy eating. (The health-related awareness articles in this toolkit can be inserted into your company newsletter or e-mailed to your employees.)
 - Promoting exercise as part of an employee's daily schedule.
 - Encouraging your employees to enroll in an online lifestyle improvement program such as the *Nourish* nutrition support.
 - Referring at-risk employees who are GuideStone medical plan participants to personal Health Coaches through Blues on Call®.
- **Create a supportive environment.** If, for example, you want your employees to exercise more, make it easier for them to do it during the workday. Consider bringing in exercise equipment or making workout tapes available for lunchtime exercise. Or you could negotiate a group discount at a local gym and organize a field trip to encourage members to join together.
- **Concentrate on complete wellness.** Focusing on mind, body and spirit in your health program helps ensure that your employees reap the full benefits of your wellness program. Sharpen mental acuity with crossword puzzles or Sudoku; improve physical health through healthy eating and exercise; increase spiritual well-being by doing a daily devotional, working to reduce stress, or sharing a weekly Bible verse.

II. Developing a program: Activities that work

Developing a wellness program can seem a little overwhelming, but it can be as simple or complicated as you wish. Factors like the number of events you'd like to have, activities you want to plan, or employees who wish to participate help determine the scale of your program. Below are several activities that can be combined to create a comprehensive wellness program that works for your organization.

Mind

When it comes to your brain, the old adage of “use it or lose it” might actually be true. Evidence shows that individuals who continue to engage in stimulating mental activities throughout their adult life show fewer, less severe signs of age-related memory loss. Participation in activities like working crossword puzzles, reading newspapers, playing puzzle games and going to museums are even believed to lower an individual's risk of developing Alzheimer's disease. Here are some suggested “brain building” activities:

- Tackle Scrabble or crossword puzzle challenges.
- Work Sudoku puzzles or other number games.
- Start a book club.
- Set up an “opposite way” challenge: Doing a daily activity — like brushing your teeth or combing your hair — with the opposite hand helps build new neural connections and keep your brain healthy!

Body

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, in order for America to effectively address escalating health care costs, we must first address the problem of chronic diseases and how to prevent them. That's largely what being Well Informed is all about.

Regular physical activity has been shown to substantially reduce the risk of coronary heart disease, stroke, colon cancer, diabetes and high blood pressure. It also helps to control weight; contributes to healthy bones, muscles and joints; reduces falls among older adults; and is associated with fewer hospitalizations, physician visits and medications.

- Have your employees complete an online wellness assessment, use an online fitness tracker or enroll with a virtual personal trainer.
- Designate a “bring your tennis shoes to work day” and go walking as a group during lunch.
- Organize a group trip to a farmer's market to help your employees stock up on healthy fruits and vegetables.
- Keep bottled or filtered water readily available on-site. Drinking water helps the body function at its best and helps control food cravings.

- Distribute inexpensive pedometers and have a “walk the line” contest: The participant with the most steps gets a prize.
- Challenge your employees to replace one “bad” food with a “good” one. Refer them to Well Informed's online recipes and nutrition resources for tips and ideas.

Spirit

Just like physical muscles, spiritual muscles need regular exercise to stay healthy. Matthew 6:33 tells us to *Seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.* How can you stay spiritually healthy?

- **Read the Bible daily.** To be able to enjoy a well-balanced, fulfilled spiritual life we must search the Scriptures. “...for they received the message with great eagerness and examined the Scriptures every day...” (Acts 17:11).
- **Pray daily.** In the hustle and bustle of your life, be sure that you do not neglect spending time talking and listening to God.
- **Be of service to others.** *For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do* (Ephesians 2:10). Nothing takes your mind off your own troubles better than helping someone else with theirs. Whether it's praying for the needs of others, teaching a Sunday school class, visiting someone who's lonely or any number of other areas of service, somewhere there's a need that only you can fill.
- **Learn to be still.** Taking time every day to relax and live “in the moment” will help you de-stress, improve your mood, lower your blood pressure and help you focus on keeping your spirit healthy.

Here are a few ideas to help support your employees' spiritual health:

- Send out a daily e-mail devotional to begin each day.
- Encourage employees to keep a prayer journal. Set up a way to submit prayer requests, anonymously if desired.
- Sponsor a needy family at Christmas or participate in a Christmas in July work program.
- Create a “relaxation corner” where employees can spend time reflecting, meditating or in prayer.

III. Next steps: Motivating and measuring success

Strong wellness programs are most often built around incentives. Depending on the size and budget of your organization, these incentives may be as simple as a drawing to win a gym bag or a gift card, to money off monthly insurance coverage cost for employees who actively participate and meet certain criteria. Creating incentives, tracking participation and measuring results for your employees can be the biggest hurdles when it comes to administering a wellness program.

Incentives

The goal of any wellness program is to move employees from “high-risk” categories into “lower-risk” categories, thereby boosting the overall health of your employee population and cutting down on chronic condition or lifestyle-related health care costs. Participating in a wellness program takes effort, and while the positive health return is sometimes reason enough to get involved, more often employees require an incentive to “buy in” to the program.

- **Cold, hard cash.** You can assign a dollar value to certain activities (such as participating in a wellness screening or completing an online assessment) or create a point system by which employees can earn points that “add up” to money off their monthly insurance cost of coverage. (For example, if Jane Smith participates in her organization’s wellness program, she receives \$10 per month off the cost of her insurance coverage.)
- **Prizes and drawings.** If cash incentives are not an option for your organization, then drawings and/or prizes may be a better fit. The up-front investment on these items may be as big or as small as you wish, and you may attach them to certain activities or overall points. For example, you may enter everyone who takes an online wellness assessment in a drawing for a small prize, or enter everyone who earns a certain number of points in a drawing for a “grand prize.” Your prizes can be as creative as you wish: from special parking spots and extra vacation time to gym memberships and gift cards. Be sure to publicize the winners to promote your overall program and boost morale.
- **Bragging rights.** While “bragging rights” alone rarely work as true incentives, never underestimate their motivational power. Creating teams and pitting them against one another in friendly competition (example: number of stairs climbed or steps taken, a nutrition quiz) can be an effective way to get everyone involved, create excitement and generate interest. Again, be sure to publicize the winners of the competition and give them their due bragging rights.

Tracking participation

You can track employee participation in a number of ways. Having people enter drawings upon completing certain tasks

helps you keep a record of all those who participated. However, some activities do not lend themselves to this method, so you must rely on your employees to report their own participation to you. To help you better understand how this might be documented, we’ve created a tracking template complete with a sample point system and included it in this toolkit for your reference.

Measuring progress

Tracking participation is one thing, but tracking measurable progress is quite another. This is where wellness assessments, online tools or employee worksheets (such as food diaries or weight logs) can come in. Repeating certain assessments each calendar year or every quarter can give you mile markers to help you chart progress over time. For example:

- Having a general “wellness overview” event on-site in the first quarter that includes taking blood pressure and weight measurements can give you a baseline to measure against throughout the year. Reduced weight and blood pressure would be included in your program goals, and success could be measured through repeated assessments over time.
- If your resources prohibit setting up such on-site assessments, having your employees participate in one of the online health risk assessments or the health quotient questionnaire is an alternative way to establish a base line. Comparing results across calendar years can give you a sense of whether your employees’ health and lifestyle choices are improving, and whether your wellness efforts are helping drive improvement.
- Other ways to track progress involve getting at-risk employees involved in chronic condition management and lifestyle improvement programs. With GuideStone’s Well Informed, you have a wide range of such programs available. If on-site screenings reveal that an employee is at-risk for hypertension, for example, creating specific incentives for that employee to enroll in a specific program may help you target your program more directly. Progress could be measured not only in the enrollment rates of participants in appropriate programs, but also in the health improvement (or decline) of those at-risk employees over time.