

Steps to Physical Activity

Step 1: Building Support

It is important to obtain leadership support. Without support, a physical activity program is less likely to succeed. A champion from within the company can help promote physical activity among employees. A physical activity champion is someone who supports this cause, helps to achieve it, and is also active in your employee wellness program.

Any one who champions worksite physical activity programs needs to know and communicate how such programs can enhance the wellness of employees and the company. The



The Champion Should:

Recognize the benefits of the program for the company or workplace.

Promote the Program.

Participate in the Program.

Recognize Employee Involvement in the Program.

Recognize Employee Achievement in the Program.

Evaluate the Program.

Create a Culture of Wellness.



Without the support of a champion, a physical activity program is less likely to succeed. A champion needs to promote and participate in the program.

champion will give time and resources to make the program succeed. In addition, a champion should ensure the program becomes a part of the company's culture. This requires the program be linked to the company's priorities, strategic goals, and business objectives.

In addition, consider inviting someone from a different company that has a physical activity or wellness program or a strong culture of

wellness to speak with your company's leadership. This peer-to-peer sharing of experience can go a long way.

There are other key stakeholders that you should consider involving early, including human resources staff, company safety staff, mid-level management and employees who have shown an interest in being more physically active. These

stakeholders can help the champion make the case to company leadership and form the nexus of a wellness committee (see *Step 2: Planning and Assessing* for more on Wellness Committees).

On the following pages you will find *Making the Case: Why Businesses Should Care about Physical Activity in the Workplace*, a resource to help you sell the idea of starting such programs in your company. In the *Tools and Templates* section you will find a customizable one-pager that can be used as part of your pitch, as well as a customizable presentation to use in any pitch to a potential champion.



Making the Case: Why Businesses Should Care about Physical Activity in the Workplace

Health care costs are a significant and growing element of overall employment costs for businesses offering benefits, and companies of all sizes are affected by absenteeism and lost productivity from employee illness, injury, obesity, or chronic conditions. One study reports that obesity alone has been estimated to cost employers almost \$2,500 per employee per year, including direct medical expenditures and absenteeism.¹



The 2008 Physical Activity Guidelines for Americans report that regular physical activity reduces the risk of premature death as well as coronary heart disease, diabetes, arthritis, osteoporosis, and certain types of cancerous diseases that affect nearly half of all American adults.² *The Physical Activity Guidelines* recommend at least 2 ½ hours per week of moderate intensity aerobic physical activity or 1 ¼ hours per week of vigorous intensity aerobic physical activity, in bouts of at least 10 minutes at a time, or an equivalent combination of both. They also recommend moderate or high intensity muscle strengthening activities that involve all major muscle groups at least 2 days per week.

The vast majority of U.S. citizens are linked in some way to a worksite. That gives you the unique opportunity to improve employees' lives and transform the workplace.

An employee's overall level of physical activity is strongly influenced by workplace factors. For example, sedentary jobs have been steadily growing as a percentage of U.S. occupations for several decades.³

A comprehensive wellness program that includes a physical activity component may improve employee health and potentially lower the health costs per employee.

The introduction of a worksite wellness program has the potential to:

- Help create a healthier workforce.
- Increase employee productivity.
- Decrease employee absenteeism.
- Potentially lower employer health care costs.
- Increase employee morale.
- Attract and retain good employees.

1 Finkelstein E, Fiebelkorn C, Wang G. "The costs of obesity among full-time employees." *Am J Health Promot.* 2005. Sep-Oct; 20(1): 45-51.

2 Wu SY, Green A. *Projection of chronic illness prevalence and cost inflation.* Santa Monica, CA: RAND Health; 2000.

3 Hunicutt D. 30 great ideas. Presentation given April 14, 2002, at West Virginia State Health Education Council annual conference. Omaha, NE: Wellness Councils of America, 2001.

One way to achieve these results is by starting a physical activity program.

The **return-on-investment** for wellness programs has increased over the years. A 2008 study of 192 companies of varying sizes using the same workplace wellness program, which includes physical activity promotion, found program costs of around \$300 per employee per year. After a year, 7 of 10 targeted risk factors had improved, resulting in medical savings of 59% and productivity gains of 41%.⁴ A 2010 study showed that for every dollar spent on wellness programs medical costs fell by approximately \$3.27 and costs associated with absenteeism fell by approximately \$2.73.⁵ Although there is no conclusive evidence that a standalone physical activity program can produce such a return-on-investment, physical activity itself is a pillar of any comprehensive wellness program and is one way to shift your company's culture toward a culture of wellness.



The return-on-investment for businesses can be up to \$3.27 for every \$1.00 invested in wellness programs⁵

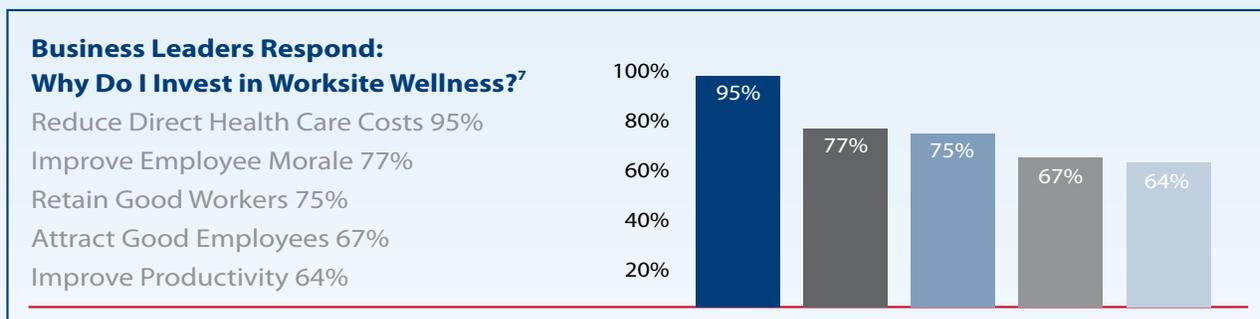
"...When employers demonstrate that there is value placed on the well-being of every individual, at every stage of health, a company's collective health, and business performance, may very well improve."

*- Samuel Cramer, M.D.,
Health Management Corporation*

It has been estimated that nearly 60% of employers offer health promotion programs, although the percentage for smaller employers is much closer to 15%.⁶ The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services' National Worksite Health Promotion survey lists the reduction of direct healthcare costs as the number one reason business leaders invest in workplace wellness programs. Other reasons to invest include improving employee morale, retaining and attracting good workers, and improving productivity.⁷ By

developing a culture of wellness that promotes physical activity in the workplace, you are able to support the needs of your employees and create opportunities for them to meet the recommended levels of physical activity.

When you initiate a corporate physical activity program, you join the ranks of leaders who are improving the health of their employees and transforming the way they do business.



4 Baker KM, Goetzel RZ, Pei X, Weiss AJ, Bowen J, Tabrizi MJ, Nelson CF, Metz RD, Pelletier KR, Thompson E. "Using a return-on-investment estimation model to evaluate outcomes from an obesity management worksite health promotion program." J Occup Environ Med. 2008 Sep;50(9):981-90.

5 Baicker K, Cutler D, Song Z. "Workplace Wellness Programs Can Generate Savings." Health Affairs. 2010 Feb; 29(2): 304-311.

6 "U.S. employers offer and value wellness programs." Reuters, <http://www.reuters.com/article/idUSTRE49K9RY20081021>, accessed February 28, 2010.

7 1999 National Worksite Health Promotion Survey: Report of Survey Findings Conducted by the Association for Worksite Health Promotion; William M. Mercer, Incorporated; and the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Office of Disease

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When you create a comprehensive wellness program that includes a physical activity component for your employees, you may see a return on investment financially as well as a potential reduction of employee absenteeism, disability claims, and workers' compensation costs. Adults who meet the recommended amounts of physical activity gain health benefits.

Health Benefits of Physical Activity according to the 2008 Physical Activity Guidelines	
Strong Evidence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Lower risk of the following: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Early death. ○ Heart disease. ○ Stroke. ○ Type 2 diabetes. ○ High blood pressure. ○ Adverse blood lipid profile. ○ Metabolic syndrome. ○ Colon and breast cancers. ■ Prevention of weight gain. ■ Weight loss when combined with diet. ■ Improved cardiorespiratory and muscular fitness. ■ Prevention of falls. ■ Reduced depression. ■ Better cognitive function (older adults).
Moderate to Strong Evidence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Better functional health (older adults). ■ Reduced abdominal obesity.
Moderate Evidence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Weight maintenance after weight loss. ■ Lower risk of hip fracture. ■ Increased bone density. ■ Improved sleep quality. ■ Lower risk of lung and endometrial cancers.

In this step...

- A champion is identified and begins to promote the concept of increasing physical activity in the workplace.
- The wellness committee has not yet been formed, but interested employees are being identified by the champion to participate on the committee.



The Meridith Corporation, a media and marketing company based in Des Moines, Iowa with offices throughout the United States, began its wellness program in 2006 as a way to encourage its employees to be more active and make healthier lifestyle choices. As a part of the program, Meridith offered its employees a fitness club membership. Though they have offices spread across the country, close to 40% of the employees went to one franchise club. After crunching the numbers of how often employees who opted for this benefit actually went to the gym, it was determined that few took advantage of the program.

“We realized that we were paying almost \$56 per employee visit to offer this benefit,” stated Tim O’Neil, Manager of Employee Health and Financial Wellness for Meridith. “It was not in our best interest to offer full-club memberships.”

Instead, employees were offered a subsidized membership, the value of which is determined on the basis of the number of visits to the fitness club an employee makes per month. If an employee goes twice per month, they will get 25% of the membership subsidized. If they go eight times per month, 100% is subsidized. This change saved the company approximately \$200,000 per year, which in turn was reinvested in other wellness areas, and in fact, resulted in a 10% increase in employees who signed up for the program.

Meridith also offered Health Risk Appraisals for all employees, with a goal of having 85% of the employees take part. After three years, Tim and his colleagues began to look at the impact the programs were having on employee health and the company’s bottom line. Of the employees who took part in the company’s programs and the Health Risk Appraisal, 97 % were in the low to medium health risk category after 18 months. For those employees in the low risk category, there was a 9% decline in insurance claims. For employees in the medium risk category, there was a 39 percent decline in claims. For the 3% in the high risk category, there was a 30% increase in claims.

The return-on-investment for Meridith has truly paid off. Reviewing the actual number of dollars, Tim and his colleagues realized that their investment in physical activity and wellness programs over the course of 4 years resulted in a savings of \$3.50 for every \$1.00 spent.

“Investing in these programs doesn’t just make sense,” said Tim. “It makes cents. Literally.”

Step 2: Planning and Assessing

Planning is an essential step of any worksite wellness program. The planning process helps to gain support and to create a program that is both meaningful and lasting.

One of the first steps is to create a wellness committee to help guide the process. Members of the Wellness Committee should represent the many different aspects of your company, from management and safety to human resources and facilities. The size of your committee will depend on the size of your company, and quite possibly the scope of your program. If your company has a small number of employees, consider having your Champion work directly with the owner or owners to engage employees.

One of the initial tasks of the Wellness Committee is to make the employees aware of the *2008 Physical Activity Guidelines* and the amount of physical activity each individual should strive for each week. It is important to keep the guidelines at the forefront of the program as you develop your physical activity programs.

A Wellness Committee should:

- provide guidance to the worksite health program.
- represent your employees and your employees' interests as you create your wellness programs.
- include employees from across the company.
- include employees who work in the field or in satellite locations.
- meet on a regular basis.

For more information on the creation of Wellness Committees, see *The Saving Dollars and Making Sense Committee Guide from North Carolina's Eat Smart Move More* program: http://www.eatsmartmovemorenc.com/Worksites/Toolkit/WsTk_Committee.html.

Examples of Wellness Committee Members

Human resources specialist.

Employee nurse.

Union Leadership.

Legal Representative.

Executive Leadership.

Marketing Personnel.

Interested Staff.

Facilities Representative.