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The Case for Physical Activity in the Workplace

As health care costs continue to grow as part of the overall employment costs for businesses offering benefits, it is important to look at ways to improve the health and wellness of {company name}'s employees. According to the *2008 Physical Activity Guidelines for Americans*, increasing physical activity lowers the risk of many adverse health outcomes, including heart disease, stroke, high blood pressure, and colon and breast cancers. In addition, increasing physical activity can help prevent weight gain, improve cardiovascular and muscular fitness strength, prevent falls, improve bone strength, and reduce symptoms of depression.³

Adult Americans spend a lot of time in the workplace. Creating a culture of wellness in the worksite may improve employees' health, and a full wellness program can have financial and human benefits. Physical activity should be a major part of any wellness plan.⁴ Increasing physical activities in the workplace makes existing wellness programs more effective and is a great way to start a new program.

Worksite wellness programs are designed by companies to support employees in their health decisions. These programs focus on areas such as nutrition, stress reduction, smoking cessation, breast-feeding, health screening and management, and of course, physical activity. The introduction of a worksite wellness program has the potential to:

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

The return-on-investment for establishing wellness programs in the workplace can be significant. A study of 192 companies found that after a year of wellness programming, including physical activity promotion, 70% of targeted risk factors had improved.⁵ 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 \$2.73.⁶ Physical activity is an important component of any wellness program.

In positioning {company name} as a leader in our industry and our community, we need to look at the well-being of our clients and employees. By creating opportunities for our employees to be physically active during the workday, we will be able to show them the investment we are making in them while simultaneously yielding a return of increased productivity, reduced absenteeism, and possibly lower health care costs.

3 U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. 2008 National Physical Activity Guidelines for Americans.

4 Soler, R., Leeks, K., Razi, S., et.al. A Systematic Review of Selected Interventions for Worksite Health Promotion: The Assessment of Health Risks with Feedback. *American Journal of Preventative Medicine*. 2010; 38(2S):S237–S262.

5 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.

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