



# A Flexible Approach to Wellness Leads to Reduced Risk for Heart Disease and Stroke at Hussey Seating

Source: Hussey Seating

## Background

The Human Resources Department at Hussey Seating is responsible for identifying strategic initiatives to develop the workforce for the future needs of the business.

## Opportunities

Started in 2002, Hussey Seating's wellness program supports a workforce with physically demanding jobs including heavy lifting, working with metal, press operation, engineering, as well as a number of traditional assembly jobs in an upholstery shop that involves a lot of sitting. Employees complete this work in two shifts. With an average employee age of 47 years, Hussey Seating is concerned with increased risk for heart disease, stroke, and associated risk factors among its employees.

## Wellness Activities

Hussey Seating has a flexible approach to onsite wellness activities including connecting employees to their primary care providers. The wellness program is managed by an on-site, 20 hour per week wellness coach/nurse. The coach tracks risk factors (e.g. high blood pressure, high cholesterol, obesity), counsels employees throughout the year, and tracks outcomes like employee retention and corporate and social responsibility. The Hussey wellness program continually evolves to meet employees' needs, although assessment and referral, coaching, education, environmental supports, and leadership role modeling are all core wellness approaches.

*"The bottom line is, we know that if we can help employees maintain their health, then they're going to be more productive."*

— Cindy Talbot, Director of Human Resources

## Health Risk Assessment and Coaching

The wellness program at Hussey centers on the annual health risk assessment (HRA). Employees enrolled in the medical plan, their spouses, and adult children participate in an HRA, which includes risk factors for heart disease and stroke: nicotine use, weight status, blood pressure, glucose, cholesterol (LDL and HDL), and triglycerides. All participants meet with the coach, whether they have identified health risks or not, and during that meeting develop a plan for improving their health over the next year. The health coach checks in frequently with employees with multiple risk factors and connects employees with their primary care providers to monitor care. Employees participating in the HRA receive a discount on health insurance premiums, per Hussey's insurance carrier.

## At-a-Glance

### Hussey Seating

- Established 1835, Family owned
- Industry: Manufacturing
- Location: North Berwick, ME
- 293 employees

Hussey Seating is a world leader in design and manufacturing of stadium, theater and gymnasium seating. Founded in 1835, they are a family owned business with a history of manufacturing—first, long furrowed plows to combat the rocky New England soil, then fire escapes and ski lifts, and now spectator seating, which they began manufacturing in 1960. They say their secret is "We're not a manufacturing center. We're an innovation center." Employees work in engineering, sales, manufacturing, project management, marketing, human resources, and other departments. The average tenure of employees is over 20 years.



## Physical Activity Classes

Hussey Seating brings exercise classes such as CrossFit, yoga, and aerobics on site several times a year, and pays 50% of the cost of the class per employee. Employees help choose what classes they would like to have through an employee survey, monthly employee meetings, or by making a suggestion directly to the Human Resources Department.

## Lunch and Learns

Lunch and Learns provide education and conversation on topics such as stress, elder care, financial literacy, and 401k's. Many topics are generated by the employees themselves. Lunch and Learns are offered between shifts so that both the first shift and the second shift are able to participate. Typically, a free healthy lunch such as soup, salad, or sandwiches is available.

## Environmental Supports

Environmental supports at Hussey include a fitness room with showers, dead weights, stair climbers and treadmills, stationary bikes, elliptical, exercise balls, mats, and weight machines. The campus also includes an outdoor basketball hoop, bicycle racks, and walking routes, available for use by all employees.

## Other Initiatives

In addition, Hussey Seating also offers employees:

- 25% reimbursement for physical activity classes and gym memberships.
- Annual team-based competitive Scavenger Hunt and Field Day events.
- Accommodations (within scheduling constraints) for arrival and departure times to allow for physical activity, including for small group bike rides.
- Leadership modeling of healthy behaviors, including lunchtime walks by the CEO, and other members of the leadership team.

## Challenges

Hussey Seating's biggest wellness challenge occurs when employees will sign up for a physical activity class and then only attend one session. This happens because people get busy and they can't make it, or the class was not what they expected.

## Successes

According to Hussey's data, 90% of Hussey Seating employees who are on the company's medical plan participate in the HRA and wellness coaching. The programs and environmental supports are available to all employees. Over 35 employees have been in the wellness program for 15 years and have maintained or lowered their risk factors over time. In 2017, out of 318 employees and family members assessed for heart attack and stroke risks, only nine lab alerts indicated need for further medical attention. Between 2003 and 2017, the percentage of employees and family members falling within the highest overall health risk level decreased from 10.1% to 6.0%, and those in the lowest risk category increased from 34.9% to 39.0%. Across all heart disease and stroke risk factors assessed in the HRA, every indicator for Hussey Seating is lower than the national average of companies screened by the HRA company. Perhaps most importantly, the health status of Hussey Seating employees is staying relatively consistent, even as the long tenured workforce ages and their rates of heart disease and stroke risk factors would be expected to increase.

According to the Director of Human Resources, Cindy Talbot, flexibility and connecting employees to their primary care providers are the two most important factors for healthy employees at Hussey. In addition, leadership buy-in, affordability, and a holistic approach to wellness have facilitated a successful program.



Sixth generation family owner, Tom Hussey, bikes in the honorary Hussey torch to kick off the 2017 Field Day festivities.

*"Right now, [having] a wellness program is not a bonus, it's a must for companies to keep up... You've got to have one. And it's... about being flexible, making sure that people are getting what they're interested in. Just because I'm interested in something doesn't mean they're going to be. So, listening to the employees and making sure they're being heard, and their ideas are being implemented. That's the way that we'd be able to, hopefully, expand in the future."*

– Stephanie Whitman,  
Marketing Manager of  
Advertising and Communications

*"Budgeting has not really been that big of an issue [for us]. Most of the things that we've done, they're free... Even, those little exercise classes. I mean, they may run us \$500 a pop. The Lunch and Learns are very reasonable and sometimes the speakers come in for free. So, cost really hasn't been a factor... There are really a lot of things you can do, and they don't cost you anything."*

– Cindy Talbot,  
Director of Human Resources