

FAQs about Wellness Programs

When you are considering implementing a workplace wellness program, you may have a lot of questions. Below are some answers to frequently asked questions about wellness initiatives.

We can't do a comprehensive program right now, but is it still worth doing something?

Absolutely—even a small activity can plant the seeds of success for your program to grow. Engage in some low-cost activities, like providing a health and wellness bulletin board or newsletter. You can also coordinate walking groups or encourage managers to hold walking meetings when it is nice outside. These small steps can promote a healthier workplace.

There is so much we could do in our program. Where do we start?

After you have secured management support, researching the health needs of your employees is the best way to identify which activities will resonate most with your employees. Make sure the first programs you develop are fun and interactive, because they will be the first impression that employees get of your wellness program. Start with programs that have broad appeal instead of those that might only be of interest to a smaller, more targeted group. In addition, because there are many regulations governing workplace wellness programs, make sure to review legal considerations or consult with legal counsel before implementing a wellness program.

We have tried health and lifestyle programs but participation is small. What can we do?

Keep trying, and be patient. It will take some time for your program to get going. Remember that, ultimately, you are trying to change workplace culture, and change is a process that happens slowly over time.

One approach that has proven successful for employers, though, is to offer incentives for participation or attendance. For instance, you could offer free healthy snacks if employees attend a wellness meeting. Another approach is to invite people in the organization who are well-liked and respected to participate in your program in the hopes that it will encourage other employees to join as well.

We have a lot of work to do in the area of nutrition. How can we avoid getting the reputation of being the “food police”?

In educational sessions, talk about the health issues around fats, added sugars and portion sizes, but avoid demonizing unhealthy foods. If people feel like they are being attacked for their lifestyle habits, they may be reluctant to participate in future wellness initiatives.

Instead, empower employees by teaching them the benefits of healthy eating and the positive impact it can have on their life (more energy, better sleep, etc.). Encourage employees to add more healthy foods to their diets and make healthy foods available at work to encourage employees to grab an apple rather than buy a candy bar out of the vending machine. As employees begin to eat healthier, they will notice how unhealthy foods make them feel sluggish, and they will begin to avoid them on their own.

CEO and leadership support is important, but they will probably never come to lunch-and-learns or walking groups. How can we show their support to employees?

Some of the best support management can provide is HR and financial resources for the program. Endorsing a policy change that supports wellness is another important type of high level support. In addition, you can plan a program kick-off and have leadership visibly present and participating. Get the event on their calendars early, or ask leadership to write a short email or intranet post that demonstrates their excitement about the wellness initiative.

Some employees are suspicious about the motives of the program. What can we do about it?

Employees may be hesitant to share their health information and participate in wellness activities because they may feel like employers shouldn't be monitoring their health. Wellness programs may also cause unhealthy employees to become nervous about their job security, especially if your company has recently gone through downsizing.

The most important thing you can do to curtail suspicion is to encourage honest, open communication. Tell your employees not only what you are planning, but also why you are doing it. Discuss the benefits of wellness programs for the company and for the employees. You can mention the high cost of health care as an incentive for creating the program, but also talk about how you value your employees' well-being and want to equip them with the resources to live healthy lives. Reassure them that their personal health information will be protected and only used for wellness purposes.

Source: Wisconsin Worksite Wellness Resource Kit

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