



## Encouraging Healthy Habits Can Save Employers Time and Money

By Andrea Holwegner BSc, RD

### Poor Nutrition and Lifestyle Habits Lead to Lost Employee Productivity

Robert, a CEO of an oil and gas company, learned from his human resources team that one of the biggest challenges for his employees was related to presenteeism (being present at work, but not performing optimally). After estimating bottom line costs associated with this, like many companies, he looked to time management, systems and technology as options to improve this. After digging deeper, he learned that health-related factors were more significant issues for his team than investing in new business resources or time-management training.

**Addressing employee health and nutrition habits is one of the key ways employers can improve bottom line costs related to lost productivity, sick days, stress leaves, burnout and health benefit costs.**

An October 2012 study published in Population Health Management by Ray M. Merrill and colleagues reviewed close to 20,000 employees working at three large geographically diverse companies and found that even **one unhealthy habit lowers productivity.**

### Here are some of the highlights of the study:

Employees with an unhealthy diet had a 66 per cent increased risk of lower productivity than those who ate a healthy diet.

Employees who exercised rarely had a 50 per cent increased risk of lower productivity than those who exercised regularly.

Employees who smoked had a 28 per cent higher risk of lower productivity than non-smokers.

Depression, carrying excess body weight, high blood pressure and high blood cholesterol levels also increase the risk of lost productivity.

More women than men were susceptible to productivity loss.

Those aged 30-49 years had the highest loss of productivity compared to those younger or older.

Productivity loss was highest in the following job categories: service, clerical/office, transportation, professional, manager/executive, business owner, manufacturing/production and sales workers.

It's your **health.**



**Take a stand.**

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Furthermore, this research study also showed that when employers provide support for eating healthier, getting more exercise and becoming emotionally healthy, employees respond positively with higher productivity.

**Outside of traditional workplace wellness programs, here are a few other ways that employers can improve productivity.**

**1. Movable Meetings:** When feasible, consider a one-on-one meeting with a colleague while walking instead of sitting to improve not only physical well-being, but also emotional health. This can be done either inside walkways or outside (weather permitting). Leadership from the upper management and executive team is essential so that employees see this as a welcomed thing to do.

**2. Healthy Catering Menu:** Work with a dietitian to develop a healthy catering menu with your vendors to give a selection of healthy ideas for meetings and internal events. Ideas such as yogurt parfaits, fruit and cheese platters or raw veggie trays with hummus and pita are just a few of the ideas that would be healthier (and well-received) than a traditional box of doughnuts, pop or tray of squares. For meals, try a build your own salad bar theme, sandwiches with raw veggies and fruit fondue or hot buffet with green salad, black bean salad, rice and entree.

**3. Healthy Vending Machines:** Research shows we eat more of whatever is convenient in our environment. Make healthy choices easier to access by taking out traditional vending machine items such as pop and chips and replace them with a selection of healthier options such as unsweetened juice, nuts, dried fruit, whole grain crackers and more.

**4. Offer Free Healthy Snacks:** Save money by replacing bottled water with tap water or a water filtration system and reusable company water bottles. Stop offering free pop and instead use this budget for bringing in healthier snack options daily or weekly, especially during the mid-afternoon, which is one of the lowest productivity times of the day. Try yogurt, nuts, trail mix, cereal, milk, fresh fruit trays, granola bars, whole pieces of fruit, raw veggies and dip, whole grain crackers and cheese. Order a weekly-catered item such as fresh fruit smoothies, bruschetta, souvlaki skewers, Greek salad cups, Vietnamese salad rolls, sushi, or fruit kebabs with yogurt.

**5. Move Every Hour:** Research shows getting up and moving your body several times per hour is great for energy and productivity. Walk to a colleague's office instead of calling. Take the stairs when going to a different floor. Stand up and move instead of sitting to make a phone call.

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