

# WORKPLACE WELLNESS

## DISEASE MANAGEMENT GUIDE



**Provided by: Ardent Solutions**

14090 SW Freeway, Suite 200

Sugar Land, TX 77479

Tel: 855-770-4118

**ARDENT**  
SOLUTIONS

# Disease Management

People with chronic conditions are more likely to use health care services, miss work and incur higher health care costs. Because they recognize the impact that poor health can have on the workplace, many employers are looking to implement workplace wellness programs that focus on preventing and helping manage disease.

According to a report in Health Affairs, for every dollar invested in workplace wellness programs, medical costs drop an average of \$3.27 and absenteeism costs fall by \$2.73. Furthermore, a recent study by Rand found that the disease management program of one of the nation's largest food, snack and beverage manufacturers reduced health care costs by \$136 per participant, in part, due to a 29 percent decrease in hospital admissions—highlighting the significant financial benefits that can be achieved through an effective workplace wellness program.

Figuring out which initiatives to implement, though, can be challenging. That's why Ardent Solutions is here to help. The following guide provides an overview of some of the top health concerns facing employees today and what you can do to improve employee wellbeing and reduce health care expenses.

# Table of Contents

<b>Initiatives for Heart Health</b> .....	<b>4</b>
Activities and Programs .....	4
Healthier Employees Are More Productive Employees.....	5
<b>Initiatives to Promote Nutrition</b> .....	<b>6</b>
Activities to Promote Wellness .....	6
A Well-balanced Diet Can Lead to a More Productive Workforce .....	7
<b>Initiatives to Fight Cancer</b> .....	<b>8</b>
Activities and Programs .....	8
Proactive Behavior Can Save Lives and Money.....	9
<b>Initiatives for Mental Health</b> .....	<b>10</b>
Activities and Programs .....	10
Remember to Breathe .....	11
<b>Initiatives to Fight Diabetes</b> .....	<b>12</b>
Activities and Programs .....	12
Proactive Education Can Help Reduce Costs and Save Lives .....	13
<b>Initiatives for High Blood Pressure</b> .....	<b>14</b>
Wellness Initiatives.....	14
Healthier Employees Are More Productive Employees.....	15
<b>Initiatives to Fight High Cholesterol</b> .....	<b>16</b>
Activities and Programs .....	16
Early Detection Can Help Reduce Health Care Costs.....	17
<b>Initiatives to Fight Obesity</b> .....	<b>18</b>
Activities and Programs .....	18
Promoting a Healthy Lifestyle Can Reduce Costs.....	19

# Initiatives for Heart Health

Heart disease—which includes strokes and other cardiovascular diseases—is a pervasive problem in the United States. In fact, more than 12 million people visit their physicians each year for heart disease-related reasons. Individuals who are diagnosed with heart disease may suffer from these symptoms:

- Fatigue
- Stress, anxiety and depression
- The inability or difficulty to focus

Of those who are diagnosed with heart disease, nearly 600,000 die each year—roughly 1 out of 4. Treatment and the indirect costs related to heart disease—such as missed days of work—add up to nearly \$313 billion each year. Fortunately, there are activities and programs that your business can promote to encourage heart health and wellness in your employees.

## *Activities and Programs*

Improving heart health can be as simple as regular exercise (like taking a daily walk) and eating heart-healthy foods. However, finding the motivation for these activities can be challenging. Here are three programs and activities you can implement to help your employees make healthier decisions.

- Create opportunities at your business for your employees to participate in physical activities and good nutrition by:
  - Promoting healthy alternatives in cafeterias and vending machines. You can achieve this by contacting your food distributor and requesting healthier options—such as nuts, fresh and dried fruits, whole grains, and fewer microwavable meals.
  - Encouraging some type of exercise. Your company does not need a gym or designated walking trails to help your employees stay healthy. Instead, you can encourage them to take a walk around the building during their breaks. By walking at least 6,000 steps every day, your employees can improve their health.
  - Placing signs by elevators that encourage people to use the stairs. By taking the stairs each day, your employees can cut their risk of heart attacks in half.
- Consider supporting your employees' healthy choices by providing or reimbursing them for gym memberships. Your business may be unable to install a gym or walking trails near your office, so providing a discount for gym memberships may a good alternative.

- Educate your employees on steps they can take to boost their heart health. You can do this by providing health risk assessments, medical screening and effective follow-up education and counseling. This may help employees better control their blood pressure, cholesterol and blood sugar levels, and it could help them quit smoking.

### *Healthier Employees Are More Productive Employees*

Heart disease contributes to absences from work, poor performance and even death. By motivating and empowering your employees to make smart health and wellness decisions, you can keep your health care costs low while also increasing productivity. Simple and straightforward initiatives, such as providing healthier vending machine options and health education, can make an impressive impact.

# Initiatives to Promote Nutrition

As the adage goes, “You are what you eat.”—which means unhealthy food leads to unhealthy people.

An unbalanced diet and poor nutrition can contribute to the following health problems:

- Diabetes
- Stroke
- Hypertension
- Gout
- Obesity

Nearly 35 percent of adults are obese—which, in turn, can increase the risks of heart disease, stroke, type 2 diabetes and certain types of cancer. The most effective way to minimize many of these health risks is to encourage your employees to adopt healthy, well-balanced diets. Good nutrition can positively affect their performance through the following ways:

- Increased productivity
- Increased mental cognition and focus
- Reduced anxiety, stress and depression

## *Activities to Promote Wellness*

In order to achieve a well-balanced diet, there are two key ingredients: controlling portion size and choosing the best foods. To help your employees make healthy, nutritious meal decisions, consider taking these steps:

- Provide healthy, nutritious cafeteria and vending machine options. Choices could include nuts, fresh and dried fruits, water or tea, leaner lunchmeats, and fewer frozen or microwavable meals.
- Offer fresh fruit and whole grain breakfast options—avoid sugary treats such as donuts or toaster pastries. According to the Institute for Health and Productivity Management (IHPM), nearly one-third of employees skip breakfast. Without some food—regardless of whether or not it’s nutritious—your employees will have reduced energy, productivity and focus.
- Order healthier options for lunch meetings and company events. Buffets provide your employees with the ability to decide what and how much to put on their plates.
- Schedule a nutritional lunch seminar where a dietitian or physician educates your employees on the importance of a well-balanced diet and the methods of maintaining healthy eating habits.

### *A Well-balanced Diet Can Lead to a More Productive Workforce*

On average, medical costs for an individual who is obese is \$1,429 higher than an individual who maintains a well-balanced diet. A healthy diet can provide your employees with the energy and focus to be productive and efficient throughout the entire day.

# Initiatives to Fight Cancer

According to the American Cancer Society (ACS), cancer is the second-highest cause of death in the United States—claiming nearly 600,000 lives each year. And, every year, nearly 2 million people are diagnosed with some type of cancer. The battle with cancer can be long and can leave diagnosed individuals weakened both financially and medically. Though there are more than 100 types of cancer, the top three most common cancers across gender and race are as follows:

- **Prostate cancer** – Prostate cancer is the second leading cause of cancer-related deaths in men. Every year, 1 out of 7 men are diagnosed with prostate cancer and 1 out of 38 men die from it.
- **Breast cancer** – Breast cancer is the second leading cause of cancer-related deaths in women. Every year, 1 out of 8 women is diagnosed with breast cancer and roughly 40,000 women die from it.
- **Lung cancer** – Lung cancer is the leading cause of cancer-related deaths in both men and women. Every year, 1 out of 13 men and 1 out of 16 women are diagnosed with lung cancer, and an estimated 160,000 people die from it.

Although cancer can't always be prevented, it can be detected early, before it becomes an overwhelming financial and medical burden. That financial burden is not only carried by those diagnosed with cancer, but the companies they work for; cancer costs the U.S. economy an estimated \$226 billion annually. Fortunately, early detection of cancer can potentially minimize those costs for your employees and your business.

## *Activities and Programs*

The signs and symptoms of cancer are not always obvious to those who are undiagnosed, so early screening is important. Here are four programs that your business can implement to help your employees be proactive in identifying cancer.

- Provide education to your employees about the benefits of cancer screening and recommendations for when to get screened.
  - Include these screening recommendations in a larger discussion about the importance of preventive care and recommended screenings.
  - Communication methods could include brochures, emails, traditional mail, posters and telephone reminders. For more information, contact Ardent Solutions.
  - Emphasize the necessity for patients to seek a diagnostic follow-up and treatment as needed.



- Offer flexible work schedules so employees can take time to get the necessary screenings and to attend doctor appointments.
- Set up on-site screening services, if possible. For instance, mobile mammography vans can provide convenient screening for women during the workday.
- Ask your health plan carrier to send reminders to employees and providers when patients are due for a recommended screening. Patient reminders also provide a good opportunity for education on the health benefits of screenings.

### *Proactive Behavior Can Save Lives and Money*

An estimated 14 million Americans are currently living with cancer, and nearly a quarter of them will lose their battles. The most effective solution to treating cancer is early detection. By encouraging your employees to get regularly screened and tested, they can live healthier, fuller lives, and your company can minimize health coverage costs.

# Initiatives for Mental Health

Mental health disorders—which include depression, anxiety, stress and other psychological disorders—affect nearly a quarter of all adults, according to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). Employees afflicted with poor mental health could potentially experience the following symptoms:

- Reduced focus
- Low productivity
- Reduced cognitive abilities
- Poor physical wellbeing

The monetary repercussions of poor employee mental health are tangible—costing the U.S. economy nearly \$226 billion each year in lost revenue. Fortunately, your business can implement programs to help your employees cope with and manage their mental health.

## *Activities and Programs*

Despite its intangibility, mental health can be managed through programs, activities and treatment. For that reason, you may want to consider these five suggestions to assist your employees and minimize the effects of poor mental health on your business:

- Develop an employee assistance program (EAP) that offers screening, counseling and referral services for mental health and other issues. Ideally, the EAP would offer customized services based on the needs of your employees by being responsive to acute and emerging stressors in the workplace. Reassure your employees that all health information will be kept confidential and that sharing that information will not impact their jobs.
- Provide mental health screenings and educate your employees on the symptoms of mental health illnesses and the methods of treatment. Encourage employees to get screened, either through their primary doctors or through your EAP, if they have symptoms.
- Encourage employees to engage in physical activity, both during the workday and at home. Mild exercise can decrease some mental health disorder symptoms, and, in some cases, even prevent mild depressive episodes. Consider the following:
  - Organizing a company sports team
  - Scheduling walking meetings
  - Offering gym memberships at a reduced cost

- Conduct employee surveys and ask about work stressors (such as conflicts with co-workers or managers), job demands (such as time pressure or physical demands), the level of support provided by supervisors, etc. All of these issues can affect the mental health of employees and can give you a baseline for implementing further training or workplace changes.
- Establish a workplace environment that is supportive of your employees who have mental health disorders by doing the following:
  - Encourage social support among employees, such as an organized support group that meets regularly.
  - Educate all employees about mental health to reduce stigmas and confusion.
  - Treat people who have mental health problems with respect and dignity. Never label people by their conditions.
  - Provide training on problem solving, effective communication and conflict resolution to support the mental health of employees.
  - Create policies citing appropriate standards of conduct. Include conflict resolution and other training initiatives.

(Note: Depression can be considered a disability under the Americans with Disabilities Act. As employees are screened and begin treatment, they may request a workplace accommodation, such as a change in work schedule, the option to telecommute, job modification or modifications to their work environment. You may be obligated to provide such accommodations, if they don't cause undue hardship to your company. The Equal Employment Opportunity Commission offers more information at [www.eeoc.gov](http://www.eeoc.gov).)

### ***Remember to Breathe***

An employee who suffers from poor mental health costs his or her employer an average of \$1,685 each year, according to the American Psychological Association. How a workplace is structured can either help or exacerbate an employee's mental health. By developing helpful programs and communicating with your employees, your business should be able to minimize the impact of poor mental health.

# Initiatives to Fight Diabetes

According to the American Diabetes Association (ADA), diabetes is the seventh leading cause of death in the United States. Approximately 29.1 million Americans—or 9.3 percent of the population—has diabetes, and the rate of new cases continues to rise each year. Furthermore, the CDC estimates that almost one-third of people with diabetes may be undiagnosed. This is a dangerous figure, as untreated diabetes is more likely to result in costly, dangerous complications like heart disease, strokes, amputations and kidney disease.

There are two main types of diabetes:

- **Type 1 diabetes**—Previously known as juvenile diabetes, this condition is typically diagnosed in children and young adults and occurs when the body’s immune system attacks insulin-producing cells, resulting in a complete lack of insulin. Type 1 diabetes makes up only 5 percent of those with the disease.
- **Type 2 diabetes**—Occurs when the body does not produce enough insulin or cannot use insulin effectively. Type 2 diabetes accounts for 90 to 95 percent of all diagnosed cases.

Each year, diabetes costs the United States approximately \$245 billion in medical expenses and lost productivity. Although type 1 diabetes can’t be prevented, type 2 diabetes, which develops slowly, can be prevented or delayed through a healthy lifestyle. Risk factors for type 2 diabetes include obesity, physical inactivity, older age and family history of diabetes. By placing an emphasis on nutrition and exercise in the workplace, employers can help reduce the frequency and effects of type 2 diabetes and improve care for those already diagnosed.

## *Activities and Programs*

Since self-care is key to preventing and managing diabetes, it is essential that employees understand the importance of eating well, being active and monitoring their blood sugar. Here are four programs that your business can implement to reduce the impact of diabetes.

- Include questions about blood glucose screening and diabetes on your employee health survey or health risk assessment in order to help identify those who have received appropriate screening and/or are already diagnosed, setting a baseline.
  - The ADA recommends blood glucose screening for people 45 years or older, every three years. Those under age 45 should be screened if they possess certain other risk factors (for example, if they are overweight or have a family history of diabetes).
- Because healthy eating and staying active are vital components to preventing diabetes and helping people with diabetes manage their condition, implementing effective weight loss, nutrition and physical activity programs in the workplace are key to fighting the disease.

- Covering diabetes screening, counseling, disease management, medications and other treatments at low or no cost can help employees access the care they need—and pay big dividends down the road through reduced medical complications.
- Because people with diabetes are almost three times more likely to die from influenza or pneumonia, providing on-site vaccinations and educating employees on the importance of getting vaccinated may help them stay healthy through cold and flu season.

### *Proactive Education Can Help Reduce Costs and Save Lives*

Diabetes can be extremely costly to employers, in the form of medical expenses, lost productivity, absenteeism, disability claims and loss of employees due to mortality. By encouraging your employees to get screened regularly and educating them on the importance of exercise and nutrition, employers can lower health care costs and help employees live healthier lives.

# Initiatives for High Blood Pressure

Hypertension, more commonly referred to as high blood pressure, is a chronic medical condition in which the artery walls are exposed to constant, steady pressure causing the heart's muscles to weaken. The disease affects 1 out of 3 Americans and is often one of the leading contributing causes of serious health problems, such as:

- Heart attack or stroke
- Kidney failure
- Increased risk for blood clots, diabetes and dementia

Despite the ease in which the condition can be diagnosed, more than half of people with the condition fail to receive proper, adequate treatment. The condition costs the U.S. economy an estimated \$46 billion in health care, treatment costs and lost productivity—according to the American Heart Association. Fortunately, there are activities and programs that your business can institute to help promote heart health and wellness in your employees.

## *Wellness Initiatives*

Improving heart health can be as simple as eating a heart-healthy diet consisting of fruits, vegetables, nuts and fish, or getting regular exercise—like taking a daily walk. However, it can be challenging to motivate your employees to adopt these activities when they are outside of work. For that reason, here are three programs and activities that you can implement to help your employees make healthier decisions:

Provide regular wellness screenings either on-site or through a health clinic for all interested employees. These informal appointments should provide employees with a snapshot of their overall wellbeing. If any employees are diagnosed with high blood pressure encourage them to visit his or her doctor to receive formal treatment.

- Distribute monthly wellness newsletters that provide strategies on how to remain healthy. Additionally, supplement the newsletters by offering health and wellness seminars to provide your employees with both the tools and knowledge to maintain a healthy lifestyle.
- Create opportunities at your business for your employees to participate in physical activities and a heart-healthy diet by:
  - Promoting healthy alternatives in cafeterias and vending machines. You can achieve this by contacting your food distributor and requesting healthier options—such as nuts, fresh and dried fruits, whole grains, and fewer microwavable meals.
  - Encouraging some type of exercise. Your company does not need a gym or designated walking trails to help your employees stay healthy. Instead, you can encourage them to

take a walk around the building during their breaks. By walking at least 6,000 steps every day, your employees can improve their health.

- Placing signs by elevators that encourage people to use the stairs. By taking the stairs each day, your employees can cut their risk of heart attacks in half.

### *Healthier Employees Are More Productive Employees*

Heart disease contributes to absences from work, poor performance and even death. By motivating and empowering your employees to make smart health and wellness decisions, you can keep your health care costs low while also increasing productivity. Simple and straightforward initiatives, such as providing healthier vending machine options and health education, can make an impressive impact.

# Initiatives to Fight High Cholesterol

High cholesterol more than doubles your chances of developing heart disease—the leading cause of death for adults in the United States. Cholesterol is a waxy substance found in fats in your blood that your body needs to function. However, having too much cholesterol can cause walls to build up in your arteries, making it difficult for the heart to circulate blood.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), nearly 34 percent of Americans have blood cholesterol levels that are considered high or borderline high. Furthermore, people with high cholesterol often have no symptoms, so many of them are unaware that they have this condition until it worsens.

Treatments for heart disease cost the United States approximately \$313 billion each year in lost productivity and medical costs—making high cholesterol a risk that your business can't afford to ignore. Eating healthy, exercising regularly and eliminating tobacco use can help reduce cholesterol and lower one's risk of heart disease—and all are behaviors that employer wellness initiatives can support.

## *Activities and Programs*

Reducing cholesterol levels can be as simple as encouraging employees to eat heart-healthy foods and be more active. To assist your employees in managing their heart health, consider implementing the four strategies below:

- Periodically offer on-site blood cholesterol screening. You may choose to offer this with other health screenings, such as at a health clinic or health fair.
  - The United States Preventive Services Task Force recommends routine screening for men 35 years old and older and women aged 45 and up. Screening may also be appropriate for adults over age 20 who have other risk factors for coronary heart disease (like a family history of cardiovascular disease).
- Provide education on why healthy eating, regular exercise, tobacco cessation and stress management are important in helping manage cholesterol levels, especially once high cholesterol has been detected.
  - Education can take the form of seminars, workshops, letters, videos, newsletters, bulletin board postings, emails and more.
- Encourage employees to be more active by implementing walking programs, group sporting events, fitness center discount programs, incentive programs and other exercise-focused wellness initiatives.



- Offer lifestyle counseling, medications, follow-up appointments and other treatments at low or no cost, so employees can access the care they need and reduce the likelihood of future cardiovascular complications.

### *Early Detection Can Help Reduce Health Care Costs*

When left unchecked, high cholesterol can lead to heart disease, which can lead to absenteeism, higher medical expenses and even death. By encouraging your employees to get screened regularly and implementing wellness and educational programs that promote fitness and nutrition, you can help your employees become heart healthy and you can keep health care costs low.

# Initiatives to Fight Obesity

More than one-third of Americans are obese, according to the Centers of Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), and more than half of Americans are expected to be obese by 2030. If obesity rates continue to increase as projected, the number of cases of type 2 diabetes, heart disease, stroke, high blood pressure and arthritis could increase 10 times by 2020. Many of these conditions are serious, extremely costly and can even lead to death.

In addition to the risk for serious disease, obese employees miss more work, may be less productive while at work and tend to have higher health care costs. The CDC estimates that obesity costs the United States \$147 billion annually in medical costs, and that medical expenses for the obese are \$1,429 higher per year than for those of a healthy weight. Targeting obesity in the workplace is one of the most important strategies employers can take when they are aiming to improve employee health and lower medical costs.

## *Activities and Programs*

There is no easy way to cure obesity; it requires a life-long commitment to a healthy diet and exercise. Below are seven strategies your business can implement to help your employees better manage their weight:

- Educate employees on steps they can take to maintain a healthy waistline. You can do this by providing health risk assessments, medical screenings and effective follow-up education and counseling.
  - Education can be provided through nutrition and exercise classes, seminars, self-help materials, handouts, presentations and more.
- Implement effective employee wellness programs that focus on weight loss, nutrition and physical activity in order to incentivize a healthy lifestyle.
- Offer flextime so employees have time to fit physical activity into their days, and consider providing on-site fitness equipment, offering standing desks or building walking trails near the buildings for employees to use.
  - If on-site fitness is not an option, offer discounted membership to local fitness centers instead.
- Provide healthier food options in the company cafeteria, in vending machines, and at company events and meetings—be sure to include nutrition information and make them affordable.
- Place signs by elevators that encourage people to use the stairs. By taking the stairs each day, your employees can cut their risk of heart attacks in half.
- Create company sports teams or walking clubs, or plan company sporting events and other activities to help make exercise more fun.

- Offer insurance coverage for obesity screening, counseling and treatment, including treatment specific to nutrition and physical activity to help make these services more affordable and to minimize future health complications.

### *Promoting a Healthy Lifestyle Can Reduce Costs*

As the obesity epidemic in the United States continues to grow, the costs of obesity will only increase. How a workplace is structured can either help or hinder one's fight to manage his or her weight. By promoting a healthier lifestyle, such as through offering healthier vending machine options or fitness center reimbursement, you can help your employees better manage their health and reduce health care expenses.

