



**The case for workplace wellness**

# **4 ways investing in employee wellness is good for business**

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Improve your employees' quality of life while helping to positively impact your company's bottom line.



**For business leaders, meeting revenue goals, attracting new clients, and expanding the business are always top of mind. Achieving these objectives depends on a company's greatest asset: its employees. That's why investing in employee wellness isn't just a perk; it's good for business.**

From helping to increase employee engagement and productivity to lowering insurance premiums, there are countless reasons for investing in employee wellness. According to a comprehensive study by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), 92% of worksites with more than 500 employees offer some type of wellness program. Increasing numbers of smaller companies are also making workplace wellness a priority, with 60% of companies with 50 to 99 employees and 39% of small businesses with fewer than 25 employees offering programs today.<sup>1</sup>

Why do so many companies invest in employee wellness? They do it because it works. Employees who participate in wellness programs show significantly reduced health risks in areas including blood pressure, body weight, cholesterol level, and physical activity.<sup>2</sup>

So, what makes a wellness program effective in helping employees adopt healthier habits, realize greater productivity, and miss fewer workdays? What are the best practices among companies reporting positive results in their wellness programs? And are there any unintentional benefits to wellness programs that may surprise both employers and employees? Read on for the answers to these questions, plus four ways investing in employee wellness is good for business.

# 1

## Increases employee engagement



When a company launches and commits to a wellness program, it infuses the workplace with new, healthy energy. Engaged employees begin to see the personal benefits: they feel better and have a more positive outlook toward their employer.

In fact, a 2015 study found employees who work at a company with a wellness program reported fewer health or stress-induced issues and noted that professional obligations were less likely to interfere with their ability to make healthier choices.<sup>2</sup> The results go further: the same employees reported better results in their fitness, easier weight management, and higher rates of overall happiness and wellness.<sup>3</sup>

Wellness programs have been shown to be a cornerstone of long-term strategies to help increase employee engagement on a much broader scale. Sixty-seven percent of employees who work in a wellness culture are engaged with their employers' missions and goals.<sup>3</sup> For companies looking for ways to improve and sustain employee engagement, incorporating a wellness program can help put employees on the right track.

***“Employee engagement is the most compelling piece of a wellness program. The benefits that aren’t measured on the scale—happiness, quality of life, productivity, and lower absenteeism—are what stand out for employees and employers alike.”***

**Dr. Gary Foster,  
Chief Scientific Officer, WW**





# 2

## **Empowers employees to take charge of their health**

Empowering employees to take charge of their wellness, rather than providing them with solutions, is a much more effective strategy to help them achieve better health. And a holistic wellness program rooted in preventative strategies and programs is a great way to do just that! Focusing on prevention can help stop an illness from developing in the first place by addressing the root of the challenge, rather than providing a temporary fix to a health condition. For example, if a job requires employees to do a lot of physical labor, a holistic wellness program that includes fitness benefits may help reduce lower back injuries. Similarly, a program that focuses on weight management can help prevent illnesses that stem from obesity, such as type 2 diabetes, certain cancers, high cholesterol, heart disease, pain, and impaired mobility.<sup>4-6</sup>

Prevention goes hand-in-hand with a holistic approach. Taking an integrated approach to wellness programs—meaning adopting a network of programs that address employees’ physical, mental, and emotional wellness—helps employees remove the barriers to healthy lifestyle choices. Combining this with prevention is a winning strategy to foster positive behavior change and lifelong healthy habits that can carry over into every facet of employees’ lives. And companies reap the benefits, too! According to the Harvard Business Review, looking at health holistically leads to “greater employee engagement and productivity, less unscheduled time off, fewer workers’ compensation claims, greater employee retention, increased employee satisfaction and morale, and demonstrable competitive advantage.”<sup>7</sup>

The bottom line? By offering holistic wellness plans that focus on prevention, employees can live happier, healthier lives.



# 3

## Reduces presenteeism and absenteeism

Presenteeism and absenteeism are common problems facing HR managers across industries. More often than not, both are caused by a range of preventable issues, from seasonal illnesses to more serious conditions such as obesity. However, when left unchecked, presenteeism and absenteeism can be detrimental to companies. For example, consider the impact obesity has both at home and in the workplace. Obesity is a disease with many associated conditions and serious health issues, which may put a tremendous strain on employees and employers by lowering company productivity and morale, as well as potentially increasing instances of presenteeism and health care costs.

If obesity rates continue on their current trajectories, new cases of type 2 diabetes, hypertension, arthritis, coronary heart disease, and stroke could double between 2020 and 2030.<sup>8</sup>

However, a holistic wellness program focusing on prevention can have a direct impact on reducing the causes that facilitate employee presenteeism and absenteeism. After the DuPont Corporation launched a wellness and fitness program, the company reduced disability days among its workforce by 14 days each year. Similarly, when the Lincoln Plating Company initiated a program that included a pre-work stretching routine, work-related injuries among employees declined 50% and workers' compensation costs decreased by approximately \$800,000.<sup>9</sup> When it comes to combating absenteeism and presenteeism, companies are limited only by their creativity.

### Recognizing presenteeism and absenteeism

#### **Presenteeism:**

Being physically present, but because of illness or other condition, not fully functioning

#### **Absenteeism:**

Being habitually or repeatedly absent from work



# 4

## Positively impacts the company as a whole

Increased satisfaction and loyalty are additional benefits of wellness programs. According to research by the American Psychological Association, leadership engagement is key to optimizing these effects. At companies where leaders actively support wellness efforts, 89% of employees are likely to recommend the company as a good place to work. Compare that to 17% of employees at companies without leadership engagement in wellness initiatives.<sup>10</sup>

Wellness programs typically have two goals: improving the health of employees and improving the overall health of the company. The good news is that both goals are not only achievable, but also compatible. Healthier habits, fewer missed days, lower health care costs, and a reduction in the number of disability claims can go a long way to fostering a more engaged workforce and a positive effect on the company overall.

With top-down support and a long-term commitment in terms of both budget and time, the net benefits far exceed the financial outlays. Launching an effective wellness program is not a one-off event; it's a continuous support system that helps employees make healthier choices for the rest of their lives. This is where real cost savings appear.

Some benefits of wellness programs include:

- They can help employees make healthier choices in and out of the workplace.
- Rates of preventable health conditions, such as diabetes and obesity, can be reduced.
- Presenteeism and absenteeism can be reduced, which increases productivity and saves employers from increased costs.

### Four ways to build a healthier company

Can a company do good and do well at the same time? Yes! Here are four ways employers can bring wellness into their culture.

- 1 Build in top-down support for employees to take sick days when needed
- 2 Provide a generous paid-time-off policy
- 3 Keep employees engaged throughout the year through fun initiatives such as fitness challenges
- 4 Implement a support system, such as WW, to foster a sense of communal wellness



# Proactively invest in employee and company health



**When you invest in a holistic wellness program, the returns can have a positive effect on almost every aspect of your business. From helping to increase employee engagement to encouraging healthier habits, the benefits of wellness programs are seemingly endless. Simply put, implementing a holistic wellness program may help improve your company's ability to retain talent, increase productivity, and ultimately be more successful in the future.**

Beyond reduced absenteeism and health care costs, the biggest implications may be related to productivity. Consider a study that tracked the adoption of a wellness program by a large industrial laundry company in the Midwest. As part of the research, participants agreed to a comprehensive health assessment, with more than half indicating health conditions such as high cholesterol and diabetes.

Along with tracking positive impacts on employee health, the extensive study also matched wellness participation with the company's productivity tracking and compared pre- and post-participation levels against productivity rates at a facility that did not implement the wellness program. The plant with the wellness programs saw an overall productivity increase of almost 5%.<sup>11</sup>

Improvements in day-to-day productivity can have a significant and more immediate impact on corporate profits. When combined with the ongoing effects on employee health, absenteeism, and insurance costs, holistic wellness programs have the potential to impact a company's bottom line in both the short and long term.

WW Health Solutions, a division of WW International, is committed to helping organizations across the U.S. improve the health of their employees. As experts in wellness for over 50 years, we anchor corporate wellness initiatives with the most scientifically proven program to promote sustainable behavior change and achieve reductions in obesity, chronic illness, and related health care costs. We enable employers, health plans, and consumers to go beyond the scale to improve overall wellness by offering multiple ways to succeed along the road to healthy living: eating healthier, moving more, and shifting mindset while seamlessly integrating into the places where we work and live. For further information about how you can partner with WW Health Solutions, contact us at **1-800-8-AT-WORK (800-828-9675)** or visit us at **[WW.com/us/hr](http://WW.com/us/hr)**.

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