



WELLNESS COUNCIL

OF WEST VIRGINIA

health- headlines

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Industry insider information to help YOU do your job better, faster and smarter

Survey says: Wellness programs are an important retention tool

Forty-five percent of Americans working at small to medium-sized companies said that they would stay at their jobs longer because of employer-sponsored wellness programs, according to the latest *Principal Financial Well-Being Index*.

The survey also found that as a result of workplace wellness programs, 40% of workers say they are encouraged to work harder and perform better and 26% miss fewer days of work by participating in such programs. As in previous years, 51% of workers believe wellness programs are very or somewhat successful in reducing health care costs.

The index, which surveys American workers at growing businesses with 10–1,000 employees, is released by the Principal Financial Group and conducted by Harris Interactive. These findings focusing specifically on wellness attitudes and behaviors among American workers were taken from the fourth quarter 2009 Index.

“Wellness programs are clearly a win-win, especially at a time when employers and their employees are more budget conscious,” said Lee Dukes, president of Principal Wellness Company, a subsidiary of the Principal Financial Group. “Employers benefit by retaining top talent, energizing their employees and reducing the number of sick days. Employees benefit from improved physical health, reduced stress in the workplace and the financial benefits of a healthy lifestyle.”

Best bets: The survey found most workers are interested in wellness programs that improve their physical fitness, with 27% saying they would like in-office fitness facilities, 23% citing fitness center discounts, and 19% expressing interest in weight management programs.

Benefit costs down, stress up

Despite pressure to reduce budgets, **many large U.S. employers are ramping up initiatives to improve worker health and productivity**, according to a survey by

Watson Wyatt, a global consulting firm, and the National Business Group on Health, an association of more than 280 mostly large employers. At the same time, employers are finding that more employees are using their health services and experiencing higher levels of stress.

According to the *2009 Staying@Work Report*, which is based on a survey of 282 companies in the US, 42% of employers note an increase in employee utilization of the company health plan. Almost half of employers are seeing an increase in their workers' use of the EAP, and 30% of employers are seeing an increase in workers filing disability claims. Meanwhile, unplanned absence is rising at 22% of US companies.

“Companies are finding some relief from high benefit costs by investing in programs that improve the health of their workers,” said Shelly Wolff, national leader of health and productivity consulting at Watson Wyatt. “Workers who haven’t lost their jobs are under great amounts of stress and are increasingly turning to their employer for advice, treatment or assistance that goes beyond basic coverage when they get sick. Still, employer initiatives that effectively deal with stress are limited.”

Although 78% of employers cite excessive work hours as a leading cause of employee stress, only 21% say they are taking action to address it properly. Similarly, lack of work/life balance was cited as a leading stressor by 68% of employers, yet only 38% are taking appropriate action. Another leading cause of stress, fear of job loss, is cited by 67% of employers but is being actively addressed by only 41% of companies.

To view the free executive summary, visit: www.watsonwyatt.com/StayingAtWork.

HHS Secretary and Surgeon General join First Lady in announcing plans to support health choices

First Lady Michelle Obama, US Department of Health and Human Services Secretary Kathleen Sebelius, and US Surgeon General Regina Benjamin announced plans to help Americans lead healthier lives through better nutrition, regular physical activity, and by encouraging communities to support healthy choices.

In releasing the 21-page *The Surgeon General’s Vision for a Healthy and Fit Nation*, Dr. Benjamin highlights the alarming trend of overweight and obese Americans, and asks all Americans to join her in a grassroots effort to commit to changes that promote the health and wellness of our families and communities. **The worksite was specifically cited as a place where a culture of change can take place.** She urges worksites to sponsor community health initiatives as well.

“Curbing the obesity epidemic requires committed people and organizations across the nation working together to take action,” said Secretary Sebelius. “Today, we outline a vision for the nation that requires parents, neighborhoods, the medical community, employers, schools and individuals to take a coordinated and comprehensive approach to combating overweight and obesity.”

Specifically, the report suggests that employers can implement wellness programs that promote healthy eating in cafeterias, encourage physical activity through group classes, and create incentives for employees to participate.

To view *The Surgeon General's Vision for a Healthy and Fit Nation*, click www.surgeongeneral.gov/library/obesityvision/obesityvision2010.pdf.

Fitness trend watch

American Council on Exercise, a leading authority on fitness and one of the largest fitness certification, education, and training organizations in the world, announced the top fitness trends for 2010 based on an annual survey of its extensive worldwide network of personal trainers, group fitness experts, advanced health and fitness specialists and lifestyle and weight management consultants. Here is a quick summary:

- Cost-conscious workouts at fitness clubs and at home
- Small-group training
- Time-efficient workouts (circuit training w/strength and endurance activities)
- Exergaming through videos
- Boomer-specific programs and specialty exercise classes (such as ethnic dance, hooping, pole dancing, and Zumba)
- Fitness training tools to track workouts (Fitbit and GoWear gadgets you wear, online programs and iPhone apps)

WeatherMD iPhone app. From www.AccuWeather.com, an iPhone app that provides a combination of weather and health information for the exercise enthusiast, those suffering from ongoing ailments, and those with health concerns. Easy-to-read health indices help manage conditions such as arthritis, asthma, flu, migraine, air quality, and UV sensitivity. Know when weather conditions are favorable for such activities as running and lawn mowing. Download from the iTunes store (\$3.99).

FREE-quent flyers

FREE physical activity widget. Grab it and add to your intranet site at www.ncppa.org. The Physical Activity Fast Facts widget is a box that rotates through a series of 14 physical activity facts covering a wide variety of areas. From the National Coalition for Promoting Physical Activity, the widget automatically updates on all sites when new facts are listed.

FREE white papers created for nation's first National Physical Activity Plan. From the *Journal of Physical Activity and Health*, 8 papers are now available for download at <http://hk.humankinetics.com/JPAH/freearticles.cfm?custnum=87F48F2DCE1DDDDA&price=us>. Each paper discusses one of the 8 sectors that the NPAP will address: Public Health; Education; Volunteer and Non-Profit Organizations; Transportation; Mass Media; Healthcare; **Business and Industry and Parks**, Recreation, Fitness, and Sports.

FREE Web resource from the FDA. Answers questions and discusses important public health topics in a useful and user-friendly format. The tool answers questions such as How and where do I find out if a drug is approved for use? Why are there still food recalls? How do I report a pet food complaint? Also submit your own questions and provide feedback at www.fda.gov/AboutFDA/Basics/default.htm.

FREE guide to reducing the cost of long-term care insurance. From the American Association for Long-Term Care Insurance, the national trade organization established to educate Americans about the importance of long-term care planning, a free online guide: www.aaltci.org/long-term-care-insurance/learning-center/Savings_Guide.pdf.

FREE white paper on hearing protection. If you think you know everything about earplugs and noise reduction, you may be wrong. A free, white paper from Howard Leight, *Bad Assumptions about Hearing Protection*, provides an insight into the common and potentially dangerous misconceptions associated with hearing protection. Download at www.hearforever.org/badassumptionsarticle.

FREE prostate cancer guide for African-American men. Available from the Prostate Cancer Foundation, *Straight Talk for African-American Men and Their Families* was produced because African-American men are 1.6 times more likely to be diagnosed with prostate cancer and more than 2.4 times more likely to die from it than Caucasian men. Download at www.pcf.org/charliewilson.

Odds @ the end: The first bar code was used on Wrigley's gum.

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