



Vitality

An EFAP Newsletter for Human Resource and Occupational Health Professionals, Program Administrators, Supervisors, and Key Personnel



Health and Wellness at Work

Being healthy is beneficial to you, your team, and your clients. Having the skills and resources to maintain a healthy body and state of mind at work will allow your employees to build more positive and productive relationships with colleagues and customers.

We often think of self-care as something that takes place outside of work, or after hours, but this is a misconception that can have far-reaching consequences. Workplace wellness plays an important role in employee job satisfaction and productivity, and in overall mental and physical health.

Being healthy at work means much more than getting a flu shot or washing your hands. Workplace wellness encompasses physical, mental, emotional, environmental, spiritual, and occupational health.

In 2016, help your team make self-care a part of their daily routine to get in the habit of good health.

Building Blocks for Health and Wellness at Work

The World Health Organization informs us that health is “a state of complete physical, mental, and social wellbeing and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity.” Any wellness strategy – whether it is a set of individual goals and routines, or a formal, company-wide wellness policy – must be holistic in order to be effective. This edition of Vitality offers hands-on ways you can help your team stay healthy at work.

Knowing Where To Start

Helping your employees examine their lifestyles and determine what they want to do to improve their health and well-being is the first step towards making positive change.



A self-assessment (sometimes called a risk assessment or health assessment) will aid your employees in discovering where they are today so they can take steps to stay healthy or get healthier.

You can help your employee feel empowered to take a free health assessment (available as part of the Homewood Health EFAP) by letting them know that it is completely confidential and anonymous, there are no right or wrong answers, and the result will offer them a snapshot of where they are today with personalized recommendations to help them make healthy lifestyle choices going forward.

Help Employees Stay Healthy

A health-related strategy in the workplace can go a long way to reducing illness, stress, and employee absences. Not every workplace can afford a state-of-the-art gym, gourmet kitchen facilities, or personal training sessions, but there are simple ways to encourage a healthy work environment.

- **Make healthy snacks available throughout the day.** People are often rushed in the morning and either do not properly, or do not eat at all. Having a selection of fresh, whole fruit and granola bars available for your team is an inexpensive way to fill the hunger gap, and it doesn't require refrigeration.
- **Conduct regular work area inspections.** Take a few minutes every month to walk around your team's work spaces. Aside from looking for any safety issues (e.g. wires that can be tripped over, wet or slippery floors, etc.) take a good look at how your employees are working. Are they slouching at a desk? Are they straining to reach their keyboards or machinery? Is the area dimly lit? Are they standing for long periods of time on a hard surface? Sometimes something as simple as a keyboard tray, padded floor mat, or brighter light bulb can make a huge difference to an employee. By taking time to engage with your team and look after their workspace needs you will be building trust, respect, and morale. It's a win-win.
- **Encourage exercise for team members who are stationary during the work day.** There are a number of ways to try and keep your team active during the work day. When the weather is nice, try having a walking meeting – fresh air is always a nice pick-me-up.

Encourage employees to get up and stretch through the day, take the stairs instead of the elevator, or use a pedometer app on their phones. Some organizations have monthly step contests with prizes for the person who walked the most steps, and others help to pay the cost of their employees' gym memberships.

Help Employees Kick the Habit

Despite the fact that tobacco use continues to be the number one cause of premature death and disease in Canada, smoking remains a difficult addiction to quit. You can help your employees kick the habit without preaching about health hazards.

- Show that you care and be sensitive to their needs.
- Encourage them to reach out to their EFAP for assistance.
- Consider offering full, or partial, reimbursement for nicotine replacement therapy.
- Support employees who are trying to quit by ensuring that the workplace is smoke-free and that designated smoke areas are far enough away to avoid triggers.

Talk About Mental Health

Our mental health has a profound effect on how we feel, perceive, think, communicate, and understand the world around us. Mental illness and addiction should not be taboo topics. Implementing a mental health strategy that incorporates stigma reduction is critical for employers – these resources should be visible and accessible for staff.

Helpful resources include information about the warning signs of mental illness. Signs may include: marked personality change; extreme mood swings; loss of interest in hobbies and social activities; significant changes in eating or sleeping patterns; abuse of alcohol or drugs; excessive anxieties; inability to cope with minor problems and daily activities; and thinking or talking about suicide.

Employees who are educated about mental illness and addiction are more likely to ask for help, and are better able to support loved ones and colleagues experiencing mental health difficulties.

Lead By Example

When an individual returns to work after a mental health leave, rarely do we know what to say. Often, employers and colleagues fail to understand the needs of an employee returning to the workplace after battling depression or addiction. We are afraid of saying or doing the wrong thing, and so we do nothing. But doing nothing may contribute to the stigma and shame associated with mental illness. A lack of acknowledgement may create a feeling of alienation and result in the individual continuing to suffer while at work.

Work to foster a safe and stigma-free environment. Demonstrate to your team that the trust, value, and respect you have held for the returning employee has not changed. If you know the reason for your employee's absence, learn more about it so you are better prepared to dispel myths that may contribute to stigma.

“Healing is a matter of time, but it is sometimes also a matter of opportunity.”
~Hippocrates

 Send us your questions, comments, and suggestions—vitality@homewoodhealth.com

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