

WMI Wellness Program

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Last year I wrote an article on wellness programs and the need for them. We all want our health care to be affordable. The best way to lower health care cost both individually and as a business is to have a wellness program. By making healthy choices and exercising we can reduce many of the illnesses and causes of higher health care costs.

Here at Western Mutual Insurance, we began a Wellness program in June of 2008. It is a limited walking program, but it is a good start. We encourage all employees to participate. All Employees were given pedometers to help create an awareness of how physically active they are. Pedometers help them track their progress and motivate them to be even more active. WMI employees are allowed to take a daily 15 minute walk during work and are encouraged to walk at home as well. Since starting the program June 1st 2008, employees have walked 72,114,198 steps or 31,984 miles through August 2nd 2009. In addition, health, exercise, and nutritional tips are also provided to employees and are posted in the lunch room.

The employees are enjoying the program and it is benefiting both WMI and the employees. Last fall we had health risk appraisals done. We are planning to participate as a company in an 8k on the 15th of August, and will be doing a follow-up health risk appraisal this fall. Involving the employees at the worksite helps each individual strengthen their motivation to keep going. As the management sponsor of the wellness program, I have heard many good things about the walking program. For me personally it has helped me maintain my weight and motivate me to get the exercise that I need to be getting as well as motivating me as I try to set an example for all to follow.

Here is what the employees think about the WMI Wellness program:

“I am very grateful to be able to walk at work. In the first year that we walked, in the beginning it was not easy and then it became enjoyable. I totally enjoy walking 15 minutes every day. It has given me more energy and I was able to control my weight (even during the Christmas season). I wear my pedometer every day,, even on weekends, it helps me know if I need to step it up or not. If I do not walk during the time we are allowed each day I can feel the difference in my attitude and how I do my job.”

Brenda

“I really enjoy the walking program. Walking has always been my exercise of choice, so anytime I can do it, I’m willing to do it! The camaraderie and support from everyone who participates is a great motivator. Getting up from my desk and going outside to walk is not only physically beneficial, but it stimulates my mind and recharges me. It’s fun to keep track of how many steps I walk, and to challenge myself by trying to meet a specific goal. And it’s been interesting to watch other people from other companies in the building where we work begin walking programs. Every little bit helps, and anyone can do it. It’s fun and it’s good for you – what a great combination!” *Tina*

“Joining the walking program at work has done so much for me, I have been walking for a year now at work and all though it may only be 15 minutes a day I have felt healthier in so many ways it also helps clear my mind and I feel better about my self. I really enjoy walking with my kids they also have told me that they have seen a change in

my health and my attitude to a happier more healthy mom. So thanks to work and their walking program my health and happiness toward myself are really looking great.” *Bea*

“I have loved the wellness program implemented by WMI. We get 15 minutes a day to walk at work, and then we also need to walk on our own at home. It’s made me realize how stationary I’d become after work. Now I’ve got the incentive to walk every day at least 2 miles after work, and I’ve become more aware of my eating habits. I really do enjoy walking now.” *Kay*

“When we started a little over a year ago, I slowly noticed a bit of weight loss. This motivated me to get out and walk more, at home, at work, even using lunch to get more time. I have watched what I’m eating and increased my speed and amount of walking and have lost a very noticeable amount of weight. Not only has this been an opportunity for exercise and losing weight but it has given me a better outlook on myself. I look forward to my 15 minutes everyday.” *Sydni*

“I really enjoy participating in the wellness program at work. Being able to walk with my co-workers each day is great. It’s a fun way to get some exercise and clear away the “cob webs” as well. Walking outside is great in the summer months, and walking inside during the winter months is still pleasurable. We find amusing ways to keep it fun and entertaining. The program has not only been good fitness motivator, but it has helped to foster a stronger team spirit within the office.” *Marilyn*

“I’ve been amazed at how positively and consistently our employees have embraced our walking program. It’s been inspiring for me to watch employees strive to improve their personal fitness level as they diligently get in their morning walk regardless of the temperature or weather conditions. Our walking program was easy to implement, and it has been cost effective, has provided a refreshing break, and has built camaraderie amongst the participants. I would recommend all employers implement a similar program “just for the health of it!” *David Leo*

As you can see from the employee response it has been a great program employees feel better both physically and emotionally. We have had a 5.5% drop in the amount of sick time that was used. A wellness program will help lower a companies cost in many ways. The benefits may include less absenteeism, better retention, lower medical claims, and improved morale.

A healthier lifestyle is a challenge for all of us, but businesses should think of an employee wellness program as a preventive risk-management program for them and their employees. Let us practice good risk management and take the steps, literally, towards a healthier lifestyle today; it could be the first step toward an effective Employee Wellness Program! It’s a win-win proposition; employees will be happier, healthier, and will work more efficiently. Now is the time to start an employee wellness program. Do not hesitate! A program may include: health screenings, nutrition, stress management, exercise, or walking program. Bring in an outside company to help you design and start your program or do it yourself. No matter what program you choose it will be a step in the right direction! It is hoped that by doing so you will be able to reduce the ever increasing burden of health care costs to employees and employers. Start a wellness program today do it “just for the health of it”.