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Five Tips For Getting Started With Workplace Wellness

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Workplace wellness doesn't have to mean on-site gyms and in-house personal trainers. Small companies may be able to encourage healthy living and offer compelling perks to employees without spending a lot of money and time putting together a plan.

For a small company, the payoff can be big: Many employers report that healthier employees show up to work more often, are more productive, and visit the doctor less frequently.

But if you start an initiative, don't send employees the message that you're focusing on wellness to save money on your health insurance, even though that's often a contributing factor for small businesses.

"You want commitment, not compliance," says David Hunnicutt, president of Wellness Council of America, a nonprofit workplace wellness promoter in Omaha, Neb. "Wellness should be something we do for employees, not to them."

Here are five tips for small companies that want to get started with wellness at work.

1. Clean out your vending machines. Strip out the cookies and candy bars, and replace them with healthier snacks such as granola bars and reduced-fat or low-calorie treats.
2. Invest in pedometers. For just a few dollars each, you can buy pedometers for your employees. Pass them out and encourage staffers to keep track of the number of daily steps, walking a few extra each day. You can even start a walking competition at work. Ask your insurance provider. Some will offer pedometers free.
3. Give employees fast-food facts. Did you know that a Burger King Whopper with cheese packs 770 calories and 48 grams of fat? Your employees might not know, either. Create a pocket guide to help employees make informed decisions for themselves and their families when they run through the drive-through window after work. You can aggregate information available on most major fast-food chains' Web sites. Or, check a Web site like CalorieKing.com.
4. Offer health-risk assessments. Employees who complete assessments may find risk factors and then be able to take steps to head off health threats. For \$5 to \$15 per employee, your insurance company or a third-party vendor such as Wellstream, which partners with the Wellness Council of America, may be able to provide personal online assessments -- usually 80 to 120 questions -- based on a user's family health history, eating habits and physical activity.

Be sure to make assessments voluntary and confidential, and assure employees that the results won't be shared with anyone. Offer two free movie tickets or another token to entice employees to complete the assessment

5. Review claims. When it's time to renew your company's health insurance, look at your claims data. If you know many employees have blood-pressure problems, considering bringing in speakers to talk about managing it or screeners from a local hospital or clinic.

But you may not need to review claims data to spot opportunities for taking preventative steps. If, for instance, a lot of employees are men in their 50s, you might want to consider covering prostate screenings.