

5 Tips to Kickstart an Employee Wellness Program at Your Workplace

Physicians Group Offers Strategies to Boost Employee Health



Workplace wellness is a hot topic these days. What is your organization doing to let employees know about the importance of healthful food choices?

Workplace wellness continues to receive national attention due to its impact on employee performance and the company's bottom line. Studies conducted by the Physicians Committee for Responsible Medicine show nutrition education programs combined with healthful options in the workplace can help employees lose weight, lower cholesterol, and better manage diabetes.

The Physicians Committee, founded in 1985, started workplace wellness programs in its own office from the start. Now, after successful nutrition classes at workplaces like GEICO, Pepco, and Pearson's, the Physicians Committee is taking our programs to workplaces across the country.

Here are five tips from the Physicians Committee to help get your workforce in top shape and boost performance:

1. Make it a policy to serve nutritious food whenever your organization is hosting a meeting or other work event.

At the Physicians Committee, where evidence-based nutrition is central to the organization's mission, menus for work events are comprised of fruits, vegetables, whole grains, and legumes. If your workplace has vending machines, a cafeteria, or a food court, consider establishing nutrition standards or, at a minimum, provide healthful options.



2. Get creative and have fun trying new foods together! A healthful plant-based menu doesn't have to be boring.

- Weekly breakfasts at the Physicians Committee consist of whole-wheat bagels with an array of toppings, which include all-fruit jam, almond butter, and roasted red pepper hummus. For a special treat, serve oatmeal with an assortment of toppings like sliced bananas, fresh berries, ground flax seeds, and walnuts.

- Planning a lunch meeting? Power up employees with sandwiches and wraps filled with vegetables, salads containing beans and grains, and fresh fruit.

- Bean dips and fresh vegetables, smoothies, or assorted nuts and dried fruits are perfect snacks during or between meetings.

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Super Raspberry Protein Brownies

A brownie made with beans? You bet! The beans add fiber, calcium, and protein, making these brownies a nutrition indulgence.

Ingredients

- 1/4 teaspoon safflower oil
- 2 15-ounce cans low-sodium black beans, drained and rinsed
- 1 cup pitted dates
- 1 cup all-fruit raspberry jam
- 1 tablespoon pure vanilla extract
- 1/2 cup whole-wheat pastry flour
- 1 cup unsweetened cocoa powder
- 1/4 teaspoon sea salt

Directions

Preheat the oven to 350 F and grease an 8 x 8-inch baking pan with the oil. Combine the black beans, dates, jam, and vanilla in a food processor and process until smooth. Add the flour cocoa powder, and salt and process again. Pour into prepared pan and smooth the top with a spatula. Bake for 30 minutes or until the top looks set. Remove from the oven and cool completely, then cut into 16 squares.



● Desserts can be smarter, too. At a recent celebration, Physicians Committee employees enjoyed doctor-approved chocolate brownies made without dairy, eggs, or sugar. The secret ingredients? Black beans, dates, and raspberry jam!

3. Find your office foodies and health nuts.

Every organization has them. Those team members who thrive on culinary adventures or always have carrot sticks in their lunch bag. Engage their expertise and talent by involving them in selecting catering menus, identifying and recommending healthful options at staffers' favorite dining spots, and preparing food for company get-togethers. Consider outfitting your office kitchen with good quality knives for cutting fresh fruits and vegetables and a high-speed blender for whipping up nutrient-dense smoothies, soups, dips, and desserts for meals and to serve at meetings and other work events.

4. Find a reliable source for nutrition information and educate your staff.

Everyone is sharing nutrition advice, and there is a lot of conflicting information out there about the latest miracle food or public health threat. Vet your sources, and then educate your staff. The Physicians Committee staff education program consists of providing our staff with a library of nutrition handouts, books, cookbooks, and DVDs. Our doctors and dietitians guide education sessions on specific nutrition topics and health conditions, ranging from type 2 diabetes to cancer prevention. Many organizations go even further with medical screenings to identify individuals at risk for health problems. Remember to involve family members whenever possible for added support.

5. Lead by example.

Just as doctors and hospitals should be role models and leaders in the fight for health, so should an organization's top leaders and HR team.

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If you want employees to take charge of their health, ensure your workplace culture communicates this at every opportunity and from the top down. Instead of rewarding an employee for a job well done with a gift certificate to a local steak house, give a gift certificate to a local farmers market or health food store. Talk to your staff about the company's health insurance costs, and collaborate on ways to encourage and support healthful eating habits. Is it potlucks with prizes for the healthiest and tastiest dish? Could it be nutrition challenges or health competitions with incentives or rewards? A Facebook page dedicated to a company health program or a bulletin board where participants can post favorite recipes, books, and apps, as well as share progress are also effective tools. Experiment and find what works for your organization.

● To learn more about how the Physicians Committee promotes nutrition and wellness to our employees and for additional tips and recipe suggestions, visit www.PCRM.org/workplacewellness. The Physicians Committee has also developed a highly efficient program that helps employees improve their diets. The program has been tested at the Government Employees Insurance Company (GEICO) and with other employers and distilled into a simple program that can be implemented in any work setting. Our program includes nutrition education and cooking classes, supportive group discussion, program marketing support, resources for biometric assessments and cafeteria management support to incorporate healthful options into food services. To learn more about our Food for Life Employee Wellness Program, please visit www.PCRM.org/EWP.



FOOD FOR LIFE
Employee Wellness Program



Strawberry Smoothie

Makes about 2 1-cup servings

Superfoods are a way to keep your employees supercharged. Smoothies have only a few ingredients and are a great way to get more superfoods into your diet. Throw everything in a blender, and you're good to go.

Ingredients

- 1 cup frozen strawberries
- 1 cup frozen banana chunks
- 1/2 - 1 cup water or unsweetened nondairy milk, such as soy or almond milk
- *Optional:* Handful of kale or other leafy green

Directions

Place all ingredients in a blender and process on high speed until smooth, 2 to 3 minutes, stopping blender occasionally to move unblended fruit to the center with a spatula. Serve immediately.