

Why Wellness?

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Before You Begin

- Develop a summary of:
 - Any wellness initiatives that your company has in place;
 - Any wellness programs/incentives offered through your company's health insurance provider;
 - Any wellness programs or resources (especially free ones) available in your community.
- Review various articles about the safety benefits of wellness (see references)
- Identify ways in which less than optimal health might affect safety, productivity, quality and customer service in your operations.

What Will You Learn?

- The importance of wellness
- The link between wellness and safety in the workplace
- Resources for health maintenance and improvement

Introduction

Wellness: The combination of good physical and mental health maintained by proper diet, exercise, lifestyle choices and healthy habits. The link between wellness and workplace safety is not immediately obvious. However, research shows poor health contributes to workplace injuries, significantly increases injury costs and has a negative impact on productivity and quality. Therefore, wellness is an integral part of enhancing the safety and well-being of individual employees and the company itself!

Consider these staggering statistics

- In the United States, a worker is injured every five seconds and temporarily or permanently disabled every 10 seconds (US Department of Health and Human Services).
- Work-related injuries cost U.S. businesses **approximately \$121 billion** in medical costs, indemnity (lost wage) payments and lost productivity (Centers for Disease Control).
- Research shows obesity and other health risks increase the potential for many types of occupational injuries and to significantly increase the costs of those injuries. (National Council on Compensation Insurance).

Group discussion

Linking wellness and safety

The list below provides several positive impacts that wellness can have on safety.

- Enhanced physical capabilities (strength, endurance, coordination)
- Enhanced mental acuity (focus, precision, alertness)
- Decreased absenteeism due to illness
- Decreased short-term and long-term disability due to chronic disease

Enhanced physical health will have a positive impact on safety by reducing the potential for strain and sprain injuries. Enhanced mental sharpness can also reduce injuries by increasing reaction time and decreasing the potential for on-the-job errors. Decreased absenteeism and disability reduces the need for substituting less experienced workers, who are at greater risk of injury, for more experienced workers.

Group activity

Rate your health

Have each participant rate their personal health status on a scale of 0 to 5, with 0 representing very poor health and 5 representing excellent health and a healthy lifestyle.

Consider the impact

Ask each participant to consider how their health rating impacts their work performance and safety (productivity, number of sick days, alertness, illness and accidents) and encourage a few of them to share their thoughts.

Discuss the various health maintenance and improvement opportunities that are currently available from the employer, the insurance carrier and other community resources.

Strategize

There are many things that employers can do to create a safer and healthier workplace. Likewise, employees can provide support and encourage one another.

Ask participants to share ideas for creating a safer and healthier workplace.

Some common approaches are as follows:

- Establish a wellness committee to promote wellness initiatives;
- Speak with the vending machine company about including healthier snacks;
- Take breaks throughout the day to move stretch;
- Establish a walking group;
- Organize wellness competitions, such as weight loss or physical activity challenges.

Closing remarks

Safety, health and wellness are important to the well-being of individuals, families, businesses and the entire community. Therefore, we all must do our part to practice and promote healthy lifestyles. Making changes to enhance individual and organization-wide wellness should begin immediately. Perform these changes regularly to have the greatest impact.

Call to action/follow-up

Challenge each participant to explore and participate in at least one wellness activity or initiative offered through your organization, the health insurance provider and the community.

Publicize health and safety improvements by encouraging participants to share their success stories.

References

Centers for Disease and Control

www.cdc.gov/Features/WorkingWellness/index.html

www.cdc.gov/features/SmallChanges/index.html

Occupational Health and Safety

<http://ohsonline.com/articles/2013/09/01/safety-and-wellness-the-critical-connection.aspx>

Authors

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