

# **Wellness in the Workplace**

## **How to Increase Employee Productivity with a Plan for Healthy Living**

### **Executive Summary**

The success of any company depends on the productivity and performance of its employees. Providing education and motivation to improve individual health can produce valuable rewards for both employees and employers. Benefits of a corporate wellness program can include:

- Lower healthcare costs
- Decreased rates of chronic disease, injury, disability, and absenteeism
- Increased employee productivity and efficiency
- Improved morale, lower stress levels, and enhanced employee retention

### **The Numbers Tell the Story**

- More than 133 million Americans (45% of the population) have at least one chronic condition<sup>1</sup> and spending on chronic diseases accounts for 75% of healthcare costs.<sup>2</sup>
- In 2007, U.S. healthcare spending represented 17% of the gross domestic product (GDP), and it is expected to increase for the next decade, reaching \$4.3 trillion (20% of GDP) in 2017.<sup>3</sup>
- Premiums for employer-sponsored health insurance have risen 131% in the last 10 years.<sup>4</sup>
- Nearly 40 percent of U.S. workers experience fatigue, which carries overall estimated costs of more than \$136 billion per year in lost productivity.<sup>5,7</sup> Major factors influencing fatigue are poor food choices, lack of exercise, dehydration, poor sleep, and stress.

### **How to Adopt Healthy Habits – A 6-Month Plan to Healthy Living**

Focusing on one change at a time can increase your success in adopting new, healthier habits. Based on this incremental concept, here is a 6-month plan for creating wellness in your workplace.

Month 1 – Supplement with Core Nutrients	Month 4 – Support Stress Reduction
Month 2 – Provide Healthy Food Options	Month 5 – “Green” Your Work Environment
Month 3 – Promote Regular Exercise	Month 6 – Support Specialized Testing

### **Corporate Wellness Generates Measurable Results**

Studies confirm that health improvements and cost savings are achievable by providing work-site programs for health promotion and disease prevention. Adopting healthy practices can be affordable and simple and does not have to require expensive technology or elaborate treatment facilities. Providing health education materials can help employees take responsibility and transform their health, while bringing savings and the benefits of a healthier workforce to employers.

Village Green Apothecary  
5415 W. Cedar Lane  
Bethesda, MD 20814  
301-530-0800 / 800-869-9159  
[www.myvillagegreen.com](http://www.myvillagegreen.com)

# **Wellness in the Workplace**

## **How to Increase Employee Productivity with a Plan for Healthy Living**

The success of any company depends heavily on the productivity and performance of its employees. There is strong data to suggest that high levels of stress, excess body weight, and other multiple risk factors are associated with increased healthcare costs and illness-related absenteeism. Studies show that health and wellness promotion programs are associated with lower levels of absenteeism and reduced healthcare costs. Providing education and motivation to improve individual health can produce valuable rewards for both employees and employers. Because most people spend so many of their waking hours at work, that can be an excellent environment for influencing healthy habits.

Benefits of corporate wellness programs can include:

- Lower healthcare costs
- Reduced chronic disease risk
- Decreased rates of illness, injury and disability
- Reduced absenteeism
- Increased employee productivity and efficiency
- Improved morale and lower stress levels
- Enhanced retention of healthy employees

### **The Numbers Tell the Story**

- More than 133 million Americans, or 45 percent of the population, have at least one chronic condition.<sup>1</sup>
- According to the Centers for Disease Control (CDC), healthcare spending on chronic diseases accounts for 75% of healthcare spending.<sup>2</sup>
- Obesity is one of the root causes of chronic disease, accounting for nearly 10% of the amount that the U.S. spends annually on healthcare. A recent study found that obesity-related health spending reached \$147 billion, double what it was nearly a decade ago.<sup>3</sup>
- In 2007, total healthcare spending was \$2.4 trillion, or \$7,900 per person. U.S. healthcare spending represented 17% of the gross domestic product (GDP). U.S. healthcare spending is expected to increase at similar levels for the next decade, reaching \$4.3 trillion in 2017, or 20% of GDP.<sup>4</sup>
- Premiums for employer-sponsored health insurance have risen from \$5,791 in 1999 to \$13,375 in 2009 (a 131% increase), with the amount paid by workers rising by 128%.<sup>5</sup>
- A recent study shows that if individuals adhere to healthy lifestyle practices (maintaining a healthy weight, eating well, getting regular exercise, not smoking), chronic disease could be reduced by as much as 80%.<sup>6</sup>

## **Factors Affecting Productivity**

One of the most serious health-related problems in the workplace impacting on-the-job accidents, absenteeism and lowered productivity, is fatigue. Nearly 40 percent of U.S. workers experience fatigue, according to a study in the *Journal of Occupational and Environmental Medicine*. Fatigue carries overall estimated costs of more than \$136 billion per year in health-related lost productivity. Eighty-four percent of the costs were related to reduced performance while at work, rather than absences.<sup>7</sup>

Other risk factors affecting productivity include smoking, high blood pressure, elevated cholesterol, and obesity. Poor health can lead to high rates of disability, more workers' compensation claims, and absenteeism and/or decreased effectiveness while present at work (presenteeism). Furthermore, stress and depression are serious health-related problems in the workplace, impacting on-the-job accidents and performance.

## **Five Common Energy Zappers**

### **1. Poor Food Choices**

Sugar, caffeine, skipping meals, or eating very heavy meals can affect energy levels and the ability to focus. Sugar and caffeine are stimulants that can disrupt blood sugar levels, interfere with sleep, and lead to exhaustion and burnout. Eating a high-quality diet with enough protein and plenty of fruits and vegetables contributes to better overall health and improved ability to concentrate.

### **2. Lack of Exercise**

Lack of exercise is associated with numerous health risks. Regular physical activity increases blood flow and oxygenation of cells, which is especially important for the brain. Thirty minutes of moderate physical activity a day improves mood and energy.

### **3. Dehydration**

Dehydration reduces blood volume so less blood flows to vital organs and body parts. Dehydration of tissues slows enzymatic activity, and enzymes are vital for the production of energy. Water improves detoxification processes.

### **4. Poor Sleep**

Approximately 50 to 70 million Americans are affected by sleep problems. Sleep disorders affect all areas of life, including cognitive performance, emotional well-being, work and leisure-time activities, and general physical and mental well-being.<sup>8</sup>

### **5. Stress**

The American Institute of Stress estimates that stress in the workplace costs American businesses \$300 billion a year due to the loss of productivity, absenteeism, turnover and increased medical costs.<sup>9</sup>

## **How to Adopt Healthy Habits – A 6-Month Plan to Healthy Living**

Your life is shaped by the actions that you repeatedly carry out. Choosing healthy, positive behaviors helps you reach your goals, while unhealthy habits negatively affect your health and can act as deterrents to getting you to where you want to be. Focusing on one change at a time can increase your success in adopting new, healthier habits. Based on this incremental concept, here is a 6-month plan for creating wellness in your workplace.

- Month 1 – Supplement with Core Nutrients
- Month 2 – Provide Healthy Food Options
- Month 3 – Promote Regular Exercise
- Month 4 – Support Stress Reduction
- Month 5 – “Green” Your Work Environment
- Month 6 – Support Specialized Testing For Further Individualization

### **Month 1 —Fortify with Core Nutritional Supplements**

Our bodies need a constant supply of nutrients to function at their best, but deficiencies are prevalent in our society and contribute to disease risk. Many of the most common health conditions have been directly linked to improper nutrition and poor lifestyle habits. Even small nutritional deficiencies can compromise immunity, vitality, and damage health.

Unfortunately, even the best diet cannot protect you from nutrient deficiencies. Stress, poor food choices, medications, and illnesses can further deplete your body of important nutrients. Nutritional supplements help to create a strong foundation for overall health.

Many studies have shown the health benefits and economic savings of nutritional supplementation. Some examples include:

- In 1995, 290,327 patients aged 50 years or older were discharged from US hospitals with a primary diagnosis of hip fracture, at an estimated direct cost of \$5.6 billion. Based on risk reductions seen in clinical trials, an estimated 134,764 hip fractures and \$2.6 billion in direct medical costs could have been avoided if individuals aged 50 years or older consumed approximately 1,200 mg/daily of supplemental calcium.<sup>10</sup>
- Nearly \$20 billion in hospital charges were potentially avoidable with daily use of folic acid and zinc-containing multivitamins by all women of childbearing age, and daily vitamin E supplementation by those over age 50.<sup>11</sup>
- Vitamin D deficiencies are rampant, seen widespread in children, adults, and the elderly. Vitamin D deficiency has been linked to many chronic illnesses. It has been proposed that providing 1,000 IU of vitamin D daily for all adult Americans would cost about \$1 billion, and the expected health benefits (including a reduction in cancer) would be in the range of \$16 to 25 billion.<sup>12</sup>

When choosing nutritional supplements, quality is one of the most important factors to consider. However, with so many supplements available on the market, it can be difficult to know which products are best. Purity, potency, nutrient form, and manufacturing processes can all vary from company to company. Manufacturers who provide third party analysis of their ingredients and give guarantees on purity and potency are the most trustworthy. Formulations designed for maximum absorption and utilization, and use patented/trademarked ingredients are further indicators of a high-quality product line. In addition, supplements should be free of common allergens, binders and fillers to reduce the risk of potential allergic reactions.

The following five key nutritional elements help create a strong foundation for health and establish a bank of resources to build and repair your body, and to fuel your daily activities. Correcting nutrient deficiencies is the first and most important step in preventative healthcare.

### **1) Multivitamin / Mineral**

A high-potency multivitamin and mineral supplement is necessary to fill nutrient gaps in our diet. It provides a comprehensive selection of nutrients in optimal dosage levels and highly usable forms.

### **2) Essential Fatty Acids**

Omega-3 essential fatty acids (EFAs) are vital to health and are not manufactured by the body. The standard American diet is largely devoid of these important lipids. EFAs benefit many different areas of the body, such as skin and hair, eyes, bones and joints, and the cardiovascular and nervous systems. Taking a molecularly distilled, potent omega-3 supplement helps provide your body with optimal levels of these critical oils.

### **3) Antioxidants**

Antioxidants protect the body from damage caused by poor dietary habits, exposure to pollution, sun damage, smoking, drinking alcohol, and other lifestyle factors. Antioxidants can be protective and helpful for detoxification, healthy cellular growth, brain, eye, skin, heart health, and aging.

### **4) Probiotics**

Probiotics are beneficial bacteria that inhabit the entire digestive, urinary, and reproductive tracts. Healthy bacteria aid in the absorption of nutrients, discourage bad bacterial growth, and act as part of the immune system. Imbalances in beneficial bacteria can occur from stress, travel, and taking certain medications (steroids, antibiotics, birth control pills). Probiotics can enhance digestion, immune function, and skin health.

### **5) Bone Nutrients**

Bone is dynamic, living tissue that is continually being renewed. Poor diet, lack of physical activity, general aging, and hormonal changes disrupt the healthy processes of bone renewal. The minerals used by your body in response to stressful activities, allergies, and regular daily needs all deplete from your body's mineral warehouse, your bones. Eating a balanced diet, exercising regularly, and taking a formula that contains key bone support nutrients (calcium, magnesium, vitamins D3 and K) is highly recommended.

### Action Steps

- Bring in a nutritional expert to educate employees about health and nutrition and fund or subsidize their first purchases of key supplements.
- Fund or subsidize each employee having an individual consultation with a Nutritionist/Healthy Living Coach, or have an ongoing lunch-and-learn educational series for employees on nutrition.
- If you have a company newsletter, consider adding a section with tips on health and wellness (employees may also contribute). Or connect with a free, existing online health newsletter that employees can receive.

### **Month 2 — Provide Healthy Food Options**

The foods you eat alter your brain chemistry and affect your mood and ability to think clearly. Foods that are fresh (organic when possible), whole, naturally colorful and rich in nutrients support your vitality, energy levels, and improve physical, mental, and emotional health. Foods that are heavily processed contain refined sugars, trans fats, preservatives, and artificial ingredients offer little or no nutritional value and can harm your health and lead to inflammation. Poor eating habits have been shown to be a known risk factor for the development of three

leading causes of death: coronary heart disease, cancer, and stroke. Dietary factors also contribute to other chronic diseases such as diabetes, high blood pressure, obesity, and osteoporosis.

### **Five “Super Snacks” to Support Energy Levels**

The examples below are ideas for healthy workplace snacks. These nutrient-rich foods are great to have on hand when you need a quick a boost of energy, and they also contribute to excellent overall health. Encourage employees to eat one or two of these daily.

1. Nuts and seeds (unsalted, raw walnuts, almonds, sunflower seeds)
  - Great source of healthy fats, minerals, vitamins
2. Protein or greens powder (mixed with water)
  - Provides protein boost, supports blood sugar levels, aids in detoxification
3. Hardboiled eggs
  - High in protein and choline to support brain health
4. Plain yogurt with colorful, fresh fruit (blueberries, strawberries, raspberries)
  - Provides important vitamins and minerals, healthy bacteria and antioxidants
5. Hummus and raw veggies (celery, broccoli, cauliflower, carrots, peppers)
  - Good source of fiber, healthy fats and protein

### **Five Ingredients to Avoid/Limit**

Unhealthy ingredients appear in many foods, including some that you may not suspect. Read labels carefully to avoid the “worst offenders.”

1. White Sugar (cookies, commercial baked goods, candy, juices with added sugar)
  - Causes a sudden energy surge but is followed by fatigue; can lead to carbohydrate cravings, increase in appetite and overeating.
2. High Fructose Corn Syrup (soda, jams, cereals, juices, and hidden in a surprising number of processed foods)
  - Linked to increasing rates of obesity, metabolic syndrome, and other health conditions.
3. Enriched White Flour (pasta, bread, cakes, cookies)
  - Causes spikes in blood sugar levels; can lead to cravings and weight gain.
4. Unhealthy Fats (trans fats, saturated fats, and hydrogenated oils found in fried foods, processed foods, baked goods)
  - Increase disease risk and can contribute to inflammation.
5. Sodium Nitrate (hot dogs, lunch meats, bacon, smoked fish)
  - A common preservative that has been linked to cancer.

### **Five Common Food Sensitivities / Intolerances**

Food sensitivities are prevalent but often go unrecognized. Symptoms can range from fatigue or digestive complaints to headaches or excitability. Pay attention to how you feel after eating to identify which foods might be problematic for you. Common foods that often cause problems are:

1. Dairy products (milk, cheese, ice cream, sometimes yogurt)
2. Wheat/gluten (pasta, bread, crackers, many foods you don't suspect)
3. Corn
4. Soy
5. Eggs

### Action Steps

- Ensure that foods available in the office, vending machines, meetings, and corporate outings are health-supportive and nutritious.
- Provide filtered water and healthy beverage choices.
- Invite a health educator to provide tools to help employees adopt healthier dietary behaviors.
- Encourage employees to eat at least one of the “super snacks” daily, and avoid unhealthy food choices.

### **Month 3 — Promote Regular Exercise**

Your mind, body, and spirit can all benefit from engaging in physical activity. For your body, exercise helps to protect against the development of chronic diseases, supports healthy bone density, supports healthy weight management, increases heart and lung function, and has a positive effect on cholesterol levels and blood pressure. And for your mind and spirit, exercise decreases muscle tension, can enhance feelings of well-being, improves your ability to handle stress, and often improves self-esteem and elevates mood. Also of note:

- Exercise can cut the risk of colon cancer by up to 24%.<sup>13</sup>
- High-intensity exercise can reduce the risk of stroke by 64%.<sup>14</sup>
- Just 30 minutes a day of moderate physical activity, coupled with a 5-10% reduction in body weight, produced a 58% reduction in diabetes.<sup>15</sup>
- Engaging in physical activity as little as a half hour daily can add 2 to 3 years of life expectancy.<sup>16</sup>

### Action Steps

- Encourage employees to choose an exercise buddy – success rates increase when exercising with a friend or fitness coach.
- Partner with a gym or fitness club to help create personalized plans.
- Provide employees with membership discounts to a gym or fitness club.
- Consider giving bonuses to employees who are enrolled in some type of program that is documented.
- Create a company sports team.

### **Month 4 — Support Stress Reduction**

Stress is a contributing factor in many health problems and accounts for billions of lost workdays annually. Unresolved stress, whether physical, mental, or emotional in nature, has a negative effect on health. Regular or continuous stress weakens the immune system, increases the likelihood of illness, and slows the healing process.

To buffer the effects of negative stress on your body, it’s important to take nutritional supplements, eat a well-balanced diet, sleep restfully, and get regular cardiovascular exercise. Incorporating relaxation practices such as meditation, yoga, and deep breathing into your daily life can also be wonderfully beneficial.

### Action Steps

- Provide staff with tools to manage stress effectively (yoga and meditation classes, massage therapy, time-management tips, physical activity, social events).
- Support your employees by teaching stress reduction techniques, and exercises to combat or release stress.
- Create a “Quiet Zone” in the office for meditation, relaxation and yoga.
- Coordinate fun lunchtime and after-work social activities for employees.
- Invite a massage therapist to give chair massages to employees.
- Emphasize the importance of restful sleep for energy and immune health.

### **Month 5 — “Green” Your Work Environment to Reduce Harmful Toxins (and Be Kinder to our Planet)**

A toxic substance is any compound that has an unhealthy effect on cellular structure or function. We are exposed to numerous potentially toxic chemicals on a daily basis, often without even knowing it. Even small, seemingly insignificant amounts can negatively affect many aspects of your health, and also be cumulative. Exposure may come from food, drinking water, cleaning products, yard chemicals, and even building materials like carpet and paint. It’s important to become aware of common toxins in your environment, take steps to limit exposure, and increase your body’s natural detoxification defenses.

### Action Steps

- Provide clean, filtered drinking water. (Tap water can contain impurities.) Install a water filter system and encourage employees to drink out of glasses or stainless steel water bottles. Avoid plastic, which may leech harmful chemicals into the water.
- Use environmentally safe cleaning products. (Many conventional cleaners contain toxic substances.) In restrooms, provide hand soaps that have natural, safe ingredients.
- Improve airflow in the office. The EPA estimates that building-related illnesses account for \$60 billion in annual productivity lost nationwide due to toxic fumes from carpet, paint, ventilation, and other office environment factors.<sup>17</sup>
- Get full-spectrum lighting for your office. Companies that use natural, full-spectrum lights have reported reductions in absenteeism, accidents, and error rates, and increases in productivity.

### **Month 6 — Getting to the Root Cause: Specialized Testing For Further Individualization**

Diagnostic tests can provide powerful insights into your health and enhance your wellness. Beyond yearly physicals, you should also receive regular screenings to decrease your risk of disease. Colonoscopies, mammograms/thermograms, pap smears or prostate exams, and vision tests are also part of preventative care. Examples of important blood tests include CBC, cholesterol panel, C-reactive protein, homocysteine levels, hemoglobin A-1 C, and thyroid levels.

A very important test to have on a regular basis is your vitamin D status, since it is estimated that over 70% of Americans are deficient in this vital nutrient. Cancer, heart disease, multiple sclerosis, diabetes, osteoporosis, and a host of other conditions including the flu and common cold are believed to be associated with low levels of vitamin D. The 25-hydroxy vitamin D test is the most accurate way to measure how much vitamin D is in your body. Optimal vitamin D levels are between 40-70 mg/mL<sup>18</sup>



If you supplement with core nutrients, modify your diet, exercise regularly, and reduce your toxin exposure, yet still experience symptoms (digestive complaints, weight gain, headaches, fatigue, mood swings), you may want to consider testing that can check for nutrient depletions, heavy metals, food sensitivities, and hormone levels (including adrenal function). However, everyone can benefit from the in-depth knowledge that thorough testing provides.

#### Action Step

- Seek guidance from qualified wellness coaches who can address medication-induced nutrient deficiencies, recommend specialized testing, provide personalized plans with custom nutrition formulas, and provide support, motivation, and track progress. Specialized testing can help get to the root cause of a health issue and one-on-one counseling helps enhance compliance and ensures that individuals are receiving recommendations specific to their unique needs and concerns.

The following tests are more sophisticated diagnostic tools:

#### **Spectracell Analysis** – [www.spectracell.com](http://www.spectracell.com)

This comprehensive test measures your status of vitamins, minerals, antioxidants, and other micronutrients within your white blood cells. Compared to conventional serum testing, Spectracell's blood test evaluates nutrient status over a longer period of time and is considered a more meaningful measurement of nutrient status than other nutritional testing.

#### **ALCAT** – [www.alcat.com](http://www.alcat.com)

Food sensitivities differ from food allergies in that they often produce delayed reactions. As a result, they can be hard to identify. ALCAT is a blood test that identifies which foods and chemicals are triggering each individual's problems. It can test for over 300 foods, food additives, food colorings, environmental chemicals, and even mold.

#### **ZRT Saliva Hormone Panel** – [www.zrtlab.com](http://www.zrtlab.com)

Saliva testing provides an accurate measure of your sex hormone levels (estradiol, progesterone, testosterone, DHEA, and cortisol). These hormones can become imbalanced from age, stress, diet, and environmental factors. Hormonal imbalances are associated with PMS, menopausal symptoms, fatigue, weight gain, as well as certain cancers. (Contact Village Green Apothecary for a free Saliva Test Kit.)

#### **Heavy Metal / Toxin Testing (DMSA Challenge)**

Numerous toxins can be found in food, water, home and work environments. They can place a heavy burden on your body detoxification processes and immune system, and can even lead to illness. Symptoms of toxicity include memory loss, depression, mood swings, irritability, poor concentration, aggressive behavior, sleep disabilities, and fatigue. DMSA testing assesses the body's burden of heavy metals, including mercury, lead, aluminum and arsenic.

### **Corporate Wellness Generates Measurable Results**

Studies confirm that health improvements and cost savings are achievable by providing work-site programs for health promotion and disease prevention. On average, for every \$1 spent on health management and education, companies could save \$3 on healthcare costs.<sup>19</sup> Adopting healthy practices can be affordable and simple and does not have to require expensive technology or elaborate treatment facilities. Providing health education materials can help employees take responsibility and transform their health.

## Support & Resources Available from Village Green Apothecary

### Essentials of Healthy Living™ (EHL) – A Specific Plan for Improving Each Unique Individual's Health

Essentials of Healthy Living is a straightforward, easy-to-use, color-coded card system (also available online at [www.myvillagegreen.com](http://www.myvillagegreen.com)) that encourages healthy living at each life stage through nutrition, diet, exercise and lifestyle recommendations. A key component of the system is the use of high-quality nutritional supplements – core nutrients to lay the groundwork for good health, along with nutrients specific to age, gender, and health concerns. This system allows individuals to create a plan specific to their unique needs and health goals. Endorsed by leading physicians, Essentials of Healthy Living was created using the latest research and is free to everyone.

### About Village Green

Village Green Apothecary has been providing individualized nutrition, pharmacy, and healthy living products for over 40 years. We are committed to providing you with expert guidance, knowledge, and a custom-tailored mix of nutritional and pharmaceutical products needed to achieve and maintain optimal health. Our staff of 45 professionals (including pharmacists, nutritionists, naturopathic doctor, and clinical herbalist) offers private wellness consultations, personalized health plans using Essentials of Healthy Living (EHL), and individualized custom compounding of prescriptions. Our pharmacists are available to review and address drug/nutrient interactions and depletions to ensure your health and wellbeing. Please contact us with any questions. We are here as a resource for you!

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Bethesda, MD 20814  
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