

Improving Staff Health Year Round

Improving staff health tends to gain traction on an organisation's priority list for the few weeks during health week, but how can we keep it high on the priority list year round?

The average Australian spends approximately 1/3 of their life at work. The workplace has subsequently been recognized as a priority setting for health promotion by both the World Health Organisation (WHO) and the Australian government.

It has been shown that 96% of "Best Practice" Australian organisations implemented health and wellbeing initiatives during the last 12 months. In addition, organisations that didn't promote health and wellness were four times more likely to lose talent in the next 12 months.

Research also indicates that in organisations where workplace health is managed well, financial performance increases by more than 2.5 times.

Promoting health within the workplace requires a comprehensive approach focused on establishing a healthy work environment. Rather than focus on improving individual staff member health, the focus needs to turn to the health of the organisation as a whole. Creating a healthy working environment and a workplace culture that values health is the key to improving the health of the whole organisation, not just individual staff.

Due to the diversity of workplaces, there is no one-size fits all approach to creating a healthy work environment. Finding the best approach for your organisation will take time, planning and perhaps a bit of trial and error.

To begin with, organisation cultures, systems and management practices need to be reviewed to ensure they support employee health, fitness and wellness goals. To get an idea, start by asking the following questions:

Questions	Ideas
Are kitchen facilities conducive to packing a healthy lunch?	<p>Packing lunch for work can prove difficult for many. Having a fridge, microwave, toaster and kettle as well as crockery and cutlery within the staff kitchen is one step to making this process a little easier.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Healthy lunch ideas – apps, noticeboard, newsletter - Ask staff what's important and what might be missing
Are water coolers readily available?	<p>Keeping hydrated is crucial for concentration, mood and energy but also helps keep hunger at bay.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Mild dehydration 1.5% loss of body weight - How much water is enough? Pee test - Link with regular movement - Make water taste better
Is healthy food available to staff and easily accessible?	<p>Your organisation may decide that offering fruit and healthy snacks free of charge is an initiative that pays dividends in the long run. While this isn't feasible for many workplaces, simply having an easily accessible cafe that offers healthy food can have a huge impact on food choices.</p>
Is it socially acceptable to exercise during lunch breaks?	<p>Does your workplace promote taking lunch breaks or is it expected that staff work through lunch? Promoting mid-day exercise, even just for short spurts, not only improves staff health but also concentration levels throughout the day.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Time poor – higher intensity is valuable - 3x10min sessions just as good as 1x30min session
Are there showers and change room facilities?	<p>The absence of showers, lockers and change room facilities can pose a barrier to those wishing to actively transport to work or exercise during lunch breaks. The absence of bathroom facilities can be a deal-breaker for many, especially in the warmer months. It is obviously not feasible for all workplaces but should be a consideration for some.</p>

Are there any opportunities available for workplace fitness?	Where to start? Having a health promotion advocate to organise and promote workplace fitness is an excellent initiative. Organising teams for sports, lunchtime walking groups and even fitness classes can be just the nudge people need to get active.
Are long working hours encouraged? Are working hours flexible?	Work-life balance is crucial to an individual's health. Organisations need to recognise the importance of promoting work-life balance and foresee the long-term benefits to the organisation as a whole. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Allowing people to be somewhat flexible with their hours can help staff squeeze exercise into their day - Encouraging people to take lunch breaks is also an important factor – 1 in 5 skip lunch break
Are there methods to help staff manage stress?	What measures are currently in place to help staff with stress? Every organisation will tackle this in a different way. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Stress management seminars are one readily available idea - EAP – who is it and how can it be accessed, online resources like wayahead.org.au - October - Mental Health Month
What workplace health promotion activities are in place throughout the year between health day/week/ checks?	Health promotion needs to remain prominent within an organisation year round and the best way to achieve this is to continue with health promotion activities. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Fitness challenges like the 10,000 steps program - Ongoing education seminars - Team sports, walking groups, group fitness classes - Healthy morning tea days
Does your organisation have a wellness committee or health promotion advocate?	Establishing a healthy workplace/ wellness committee helps to engage staff and improve participation. Having a team of staff members responsible for continuous health promotion activities throughout the year is an important factor to the continued success of any health promotion program.
Is management on board with promoting health within the workplace?	Including employee health, safety and wellness into management training is the first step to getting management on board. Incorporating a commitment to health and safety within the organisations mission statement and business goals is also advised. <p>Google – Alcoa, Paul O'Neill 1987, workplace safety.</p>

Next Steps

- Get management on-board
- Involve staff
- Establish goals – be specific
- Promote, deliver and review health initiatives

References and Further Reading

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