Quick Read:

THE DOS AND DON'TS OF WEIGHT LOSS PROGRAMS IN THE WORKPLACE

When developing a weight loss program for your workplace, inclusivity and personalisation should be your top priorities.

There's good reason that the World Health Organisation has identified obesity as one of the most concerning non-communicable diseases globally. In 2014, almost 30% of the world's population was obese. Following that trend, almost half the population will be clinically overweight or obese by 2030. Not only is obesity a serious health issue — putting people at increased risk for diabetes, stroke, heart disease and some forms of cancer — it can be extremely costly, too.

From an employer standpoint, it's one of the leading drivers of healthcare costs, resulting in direct costs of $73.1 billion in the US alone. So, it's no surprise employers are turning to workplace wellbeing programs in response to this health and financial crisis to try to control obesity and its related costs.

There are many strategies for incentivising employees to lose weight, including offering free activity trackers and implementing weight-loss challenges, but not every employee appreciates or wants their employer to be involved in the conversation about their weight. As employers take on a more active role in the health of their employees, it's important to remember some best practices surrounding the topic of weight loss in the workplace.

Do: Clearly Communicate Policies

It should be clearly communicated to employees that participation in any wellbeing program or weight loss initiative is completely voluntary. Your wellbeing program's privacy policy — specifying that the wellbeing program properly safeguards the personal information of participants — should also be communicated, ensuring employees understand the privacy of their personal information and the security of their data.

Do: Offer Reasonable Alternatives

The topic of weight loss is highly personal. Employees who don't engage in wellness or weight loss programs often choose not to participate due to stigma or embarrassment. Remember, not all health goals are the same. To avoid alienation, the aim of any initiative should be inclusiveness. Workplace wellbeing programs must also comply with federal laws regarding the offering of reasonable alternatives to employees unable to meet certain health goals or metrics.

Do: Make it Convenient

Research shows the more barriers employers remove to wellness, the more likely employees will engage. Make workplace weight loss as convenient as possible by utilising a wellbeing program mobile app, providing tracking devices, subsidising gym costs, offering onsite or phone-based lifestyle and condition management coaching and resources.

Do: Make it Social

Our social network, at work and beyond, can have a powerful influence on our habits and our weight loss success, for better or worse. Help employees build positive social networks that support them in their goal. Healthy eating challenges, "step offs" and company-sponsored wellbeing events can provide the support that's often essential to making healthy changes last.

Don't: Disregard Company Culture

If your weekly Monday meeting always includes doughnuts and your vending machine is full of junk food, it won't help your cause. But, creating a culture where people don't feel comfortable eating their favorite foods won't work either. Create a healthy workplace culture that embraces a positive relationship with food. Provide access to healthy food options and nutrition information but make it clear that food is meant to be enjoyed and even celebrated — not controlled.

Don't: Skip Education

According to Dr. Gary Foster, chief scientific officer of Weight Watchers, "weight control interventions should emphasise teaching people skills that enable them to change." Educate your employees in person with speakers, workshops and one-on-one coaching sessions. Support them outside of work with digital or phone coaching and educational tools.

Don't: Ignore Your Demographic

Before launching any sort of weight loss initiative, it's important to know your audience. Research shows that incorporating a population's socio-cultural beliefs and behaviors toward health into your weight loss initiatives will drive success. The more personalised your programs and messaging, the better.

When it comes to workplace weight loss, an employer's goal should be the health of their employees. Ultimately, weight loss, whether in or out of the workplace, is a voluntary and individual journey. Employers can succeed by creating convenient and personalised opportunities for employees that support them on their journey — wherever they are.

Rolling out a health and wellbeing program across your business can sound daunting, but don't panic!

Follow our best practices and make your wellbeing program a success.

LEARN MORE