

Healthy Weights

Background Information/Rationale for Focus

Maintaining a healthy weight is an important part of healthy living. People who are at a healthy weight feel better, are less likely to develop chronic illness and enjoy a better quality of life¹. Alternatively, those who are either under or overweight are more likely to experience health problems¹.

Underweight adults are at a higher risk of developing health problems such as: undernutrition, osteoporosis, infertility and a reduced ability to fight off infections¹. In 2004, approximately 2% of the adult Canadian population was underweight².

Adults who are overweight or obese are at a higher risk of developing health problems such as type 2 diabetes, heart disease and stroke, high blood pressure, osteoarthritis, some types of cancer (breast, endometrial, colon, prostate and kidney) as well as gall bladder disease¹. In Canada, 63% of employed men and 50% of employed women were either overweight or obese based on measured height and weight³. In 2005, 48.4% of the adult population in the Region of Waterloo were overweight or obese (16.7% obese and 31.7% overweight)⁴.

Obesity rates are highest among workers whose daily activities involve carrying very heavy loads, labour intensive work, shift-work or working longer hours than regular full-time workers³. Also, individuals with lower levels of education were more likely to be obese³.

The Costs of Obesity in the Workplace

Workplaces with a large number of overweight and obese employees incur a significant cost in the form of losses related to lower productivity, higher rates of injury, disability, presenteeism, absenteeism, increased insurance premiums, worker's compensation, medical costs and early retirement^{3, 5-9}. Direct and indirect costs of absenteeism combined account for approximately 17% of payroll expenses in Canadian workplaces¹⁰.



Workplace Example:

A one-year study on a workplace obesity management program found a Return on Investment (ROI) of \$1.17 for each dollar spent. The program included coaching and support for obese individuals to improve eating and physical activity habits¹².

Creating supportive workplace environments may be particularly effective at reaching worksite populations typically resistant to health education, as employees do not have to actively choose to participate^{9, 11}.

Goals for the Workplace to Strive For

1. To increase awareness of the health risks associated with unhealthy eating, lack of physical activity and unhealthy weights.
2. To provide skill building opportunities enabling employees to make healthier food and active living choices.
3. To provide a supportive environment to enable employees to consume a healthier diet and have an active lifestyle.

Getting Started

Workplace Wellness Team, Environmental Scan and Needs Assessment

- Create a workplace wellness team, which includes employees and management to gauge your workers needs and interests;
- Complete an environmental scan to determine how supportive the workplace is regarding healthy eating and physical activity;
- Conduct a needs assessment to determine what healthy living initiatives are important to employees; and,
- Based on the results of your environmental scan and needs assessment, consult with the workplace wellness team to decide which interventions fit with the requirements of your workplace.

Awareness Raising

- Dedicate an accessible area to display pamphlets and resources regarding healthy lifestyle, healthy eating and physical activity;
- Include short articles in internal newsletters or staff-e-mails (check websites and local newspaper for relevant articles); and,
- Utilize bulletin boards and displays featuring resources related to healthy lifestyles, healthy eating and physical activity opportunities. Include information about local recreation centres, fitness facilities, community events etc.

Skill Building

- Distribute self-screening tools (questionnaires, checklists) to employees to help assess their eating and physical activity habits and request feedback for interested topics/issues about making healthier choices;
- Incorporate physical activity challenges based on employee interest such as the "Stairway to Health Challenge"¹³;
- Offer presentations or workshops based on employee interest through lunch and learn sessions on healthy lifestyles on healthy eating and physical activity; and,
- Provide continuing education for management and employees to encourage healthy eating habits and active living.

Creating a Supportive Environment

- Encourage walking clubs, workplace recreational leagues, etc. (Offer a variety of options for different ages and abilities);
- Establish work schedules that are compatible with healthy eating and active living, and consider the demands and responsibilities of workers outside of the workplace;
- Give time for employees to go to information sessions about healthy lifestyles;
- Have pedometers available for employees to track their walking progress (see resources available through Project Health section);
- Host company recreational events such as activity days, ski days, golf days, etc.;
- Motivate employees to take the stairs instead of the elevator. Ensure stairways are well lit and safe. Hang posters up by the elevators reminding employees to take the stairs;
- Offer appropriate foods in workplace cafeterias, vending machines at workplace functions including pot-lucks and celebrations;
- Provide a suggestion box so employees can submit topics of interest and feedback on activities;
- Provide educational funding, reimbursement, paid time off and flexible work arrangements, to allow employees to attend workshops or courses;
- Represent your workplace by participating in various fundraisers for charities (e.g. Heart and Stroke, Cancer Society). This is a great way to be physically active and support a good cause;
- Subsidize gym memberships and/or provide fitness facilities, bike racks and change rooms on site to encourage workers to participate, stay motivated, and learn healthy habits;
- Supply refrigerators and microwaves for employees to prepare nutritious lunches;
- Support flexible working hours to allow employees to take advantage of physical activity opportunities; and,
- Use non-food items for rewards and/or fundraising activities.

Healthy Workplace Policy Suggestions

- Develop healthy eating and active living policies suited to your particular workplace environment based on your environmental scan and needs assessment (please contact Project Health staff for more information).



Telephone consultation is available through **Project Health: 519-883-2287**

Region of Waterloo Public Health Resources

Public Health Resource Centre:

To borrow teaching kits/books/video resources please call: 519-883-2256

To order pamphlets: e-mail phrc@region.waterloo.on.ca or call the automated order line: 519-883-2374 or order online at <http://www.region.waterloo.on.ca/ph> --

Resources/Resource Centre/Pamphlets

Teaching Kits: (kits include lesson plans, handouts, and resources, some with DVDs)

Calorie Confidential (DVD only)

Eating Well with Canada's Food Guide (food model kit)

Food Model Kit

Healthy Measures

How to Make Healthy Fast Food Choices

Pedometer Kit

Pamphlets/Fact Sheets:

For employers and wellness providers:

Eating well with Canada's Food Guide: A Resource for Educators and Communicators

Healthy Food Guidelines for Workplaces

My Turn, My Time, My Plan - Physical Activity for Women 50+

Stairway to Health

Walk this Way

For workers:

Eat Well. Be Active

Eat Well. Live Longer

Eating Well with Canada's Food Guide

EatRight Ontario - Questions on Healthy Eating?

Getting Active for Life

Healthy Habits, Healthy Weight: A Practical Guide to Weight Management

Physical Activity Guide - Adults

Displays:

Beverage Basics

Eat healthy. Live active. (Generic)

Eat healthy. Live active. (Workplace)

Portion Distortion (with food models)

Books:

Active Living Every Day-20 Weeks to Lifelong Vitality (Blair et al).

Body Break - Keep Fit and Have Fun, (Johnson, H. and McLeod, J.).

Fitness Motivation-Preventing Participant Dropout, (Rejeski, J.,1988).

201 Icebreakers: Group Mixers, Warm-ups, Energizers and Playful Activities.

Active Living at Work

<http://www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/pau-uap/fitness/work/index.html>

Active Living (Government of Ontario)

www.active2010.ca

Alberta Centre for Active Living

www.centre4activeliving.ca

Canadian Cancer Society

<http://www.cancer.ca>

Canadian Diabetes Association

<http://www.diabetes.ca>

Centre for Disease Control LEANworks!

<http://www.cdc.gov/leanworks/> this U.S. based website has several tools to help Employers Combat Obesity and Reduce Health-Related Costs. (Be aware that American resources may be used. Please use Canada's Food Guide and Canada's Physical Activity Guide).

Canadian Fitness and Lifestyle Research Institute

www.cflri.ca

Dietitians of Canada

<http://www.dietitians.ca> - check out EATracker (<http://www.eatracker.ca>), a tool for tracking personal food intake and nutrition recommendations and <http://www.healthyeatingisinstore.ca> for nutrition labeling education resources.

EatRight Ontario (1-877-510-5102)

<http://www.eatrightontario.ca> check out the EatRight Ontario personal menu planner <http://www.eatrightontario.ca/en/MenuPlanner.aspx> and the section on workplace health <http://www.eatrightontario.ca/en/WorkPlacehealth.aspx>

Health Canada

<http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca/fn-an/index-eng.php> - Food and Nutrition section

www.hc-sc.gc.ca/hl-vs/physactiv/index_e.html - Physical Activity section

<http://www.healthcanada.gc.ca/foodguide> - for direct link to the educational website about, and for orders of, Canada's Food Guide. Available in: 10 languages.

Healthy Measures

<http://www.healthymeasures.ca>

Healthy Waterloo Region (Healthy Weights)

<http://www.healthywaterlooregion.ca>

Heart and Stroke Foundation of Canada

<http://www.heartandstroke.ca>

Nutrition Resource Centre

<http://www.nutritionrc.ca/> - Look for the Guide to Nutrition Promotion in the Workplace under the resources section.

Physical Activity Resource Centre

www.ophea.net/parc

Public Health Agency of Canada

<http://www.publichealth.gc.ca>

www.paguide.com - Canada's Physical Activity Guides

Stairway to Health

www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/sth-evs/english/index.htm

The Walking Site

www.thewalkingsite.com/10000steps.html

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Supporting Healthy Workplaces