

# Module 1: Why Care About Health in the Workplace?

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## Handout C-4: Reduce Absenteeism <sup>2 3 4 5</sup>

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Control Data began StayWell in 1978, and has refined the program over time. StayWell includes an awareness phase for managers and employees; two health-risk assessments—one for the organization and one for individual employees; and a behavior change phase with instructor-led and self-study courses on fitness, smoking cessation, stress management, driving safety, nutrition, weight control, back care, and health care consumerism. The activities can be used as a coordinated program or stand-alone.

Control Data looked at health risks related to absenteeism in six areas: smoking, weight, nutrition, exercise, stress, and seat belt use. Except for nutrition, high-risk individuals were absent due to illness more than low-risk individuals. As the number of risk factors of an employee rises, so does absenteeism.

Du Pont evaluated its workplace health program in a two-year study involving more than 40,000 blue-collar employees. The company found that work sites with the program reported a 14% decline in disability days, compared with a 5.8% decline at non-program sites. By the end of the second year, the health promotion program returned \$2.05 for every \$1 invested due to lower disability-related absenteeism.

The Travelers Insurance Company estimated it saved \$3.40 for every \$1 invested in health in 1990. Travelers' program, Taking Care, includes information and programs for lifestyle management and medical self-care, and a fitness center. A significant portion of the savings resulted from reductions in program participants' absenteeism, which declined an average of 1.2 days per participant.

Johnson & Johnson's program Live for Life includes: (1) a health screening that includes questionnaire, health measurements, and counseling; (2) a communications program that includes newsletters, health fairs, contests, posters, etc.; (3) a lifestyle seminar to introduce employees to the program; and (4) a variety of behavior-change-oriented action programs on subjects such as how to stop smoking, control weight, manage stress, reduce blood pressure, eat better, and keep fit.

Johnson & Johnson evaluated the impact of its employee health promotion program at nine work sites over a three-year period. Mean levels of absenteeism among wage earners who had access to the program declined over the study period and were significantly lower than mean absenteeism levels among workers not exposed to the program.

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## Handout C-4: Reduce Absenteeism (continued)

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General Mills compared absenteeism rates of field sales employees who participated in a voluntary, self-directed health promotion program with field employees who did not participate. Before the program began, the absenteeism rate for both groups was the same. With the program, the rate of absenteeism among participants dropped significantly compared to the nonparticipants' rate.

Sisters of Providence Hospital set up a Wellness Challenge program to improve the overall health of their workforce while reducing medical and workers' compensation claims. Staff members could earn a \$250 wellness bonus for meeting criteria in stress management, injury prevention, on-site massage, cancer prevention, nutrition and exercise education, weight management, smoking cessation, cholesterol education, quarterly health screenings, wellness video library. Employees who reached the established criteria were called "Wellness Winners." These employees used 1,224 hours less sick leave from 1991 to 1992 and lowered health-care-use costs by \$55,924 during that same period.

Decker Family Development Center (DFDC) provides a nurse practitioner on-site who handles most primary health care needs for the program's children. DFDC has also made the nurse practitioner's services available to staff members for questions and assessment of health issues for themselves and their children. This access to quality primary health services has allowed staff members to reduce absenteeism because they can get concerns addressed on-site rather than taking time off from work for medical appointments or treatment for minor conditions. Conditions handled on-site include ear infections, annual physical exams, ringworm infections, and TB tests.

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<sup>2</sup> National Resource Center on Worksite Health Promotion, *Promoting Health at Work*, (Washington, D.C.: 1992).

<sup>3</sup> Stephen M. Weiss, Jonathan E. Fielding, and Andrew Baum, eds., *Health at Work*, (Hillsdale, New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 1991).

<sup>4</sup> NEA Today, "Wellness at Work." (February 1992).

<sup>5</sup> Office of Disease Prevention and Health Promotion, *Health Promotion Goes To Work: Programs With An Impact*, (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Dept. of Health and Human Services, 1993).