

National Business Group on Health

Guide to Starting a
Weight-Management
Program in Your
Company

WEIGH YOUR
OPTIONS

Start

INSTITUTE ON
The Costs
AND **Health**
Effects
OF **Obesity**



WeightWatchers[®]
Corporate Solutions



Table of Contents

“Research has shown that the overall impact of obesity on health and costs outweighs even that of smoking. Ultimately, every company in the United States can—and should—play a role in combating the obesity epidemic. The payoff for undertaking activities that reduce obesity is tremendous.”

HELEN DARLING, President,
National Business Group on Health

Collaborators

Michael Davis, *Chair*, Institute on the Costs and Health Effects of Obesity, National Business Group on Health

Chris Corcoran, *Director*, Customer Marketing, Weight Watchers International, Inc.

LuAnn Heinen, *Director*, Institute on the Costs and Health Effects of Obesity

Sandra Wendel, Write On, Inc.

INSTITUTE ON
**The Costs
AND Health
Effects
OF Obesity**

National Business Group on Health
50 F Street, NW, Suite 600
Washington, DC 20001
(202) 585-1825
www.businessgrouphealth.org

The Business Group thanks Weight Watchers International, Inc., for its significant contribution to this guide.

© 2006, National Business Group on Health.
All rights reserved.

Company Involvement

→ Why should we help our employees lose and manage weight? **6**

Results

→ Short-term results **12**

→ Long-term results **14**

Business Sense

→ How can we rein in health care costs related to weight issues? **16**

A Healthy Culture

→ How do we get started? **20**

Choose a Program

→ Which weight-management program works best in your worksite? **26**

→ Act now **31**

Checklist for Weight-Management Success **32**

“Employers have a vested interest in incorporating weight management into wellness programs because studies show that elevated weight translates into elevated health care costs.”

incorporating weight management into wellness programs because studies show that elevated weight translates into elevated health care costs.”

- Company Involvement
- Results
- Business Sense
- A Healthy Culture
- Choose a Program

LINDA A. HUETT, President and CEO,
Weight Watchers International, Inc.

No time to “weight and see”

Employers look to tighten their belts on health care costs as employees are loosening theirs to make room for a sizable weight problem in American society.

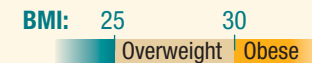
Now's not the time to take a “weight-and-see” attitude. **Two-thirds of Americans** are overweight or obese, and you can be assured they are on your payroll. America's growing weight problem is already affecting corporate bottom lines with double-digit increases in health care premiums to cover an ever-expanding menu of chronic health concerns—many attributable to weight issues.

The rate of obesity has increased so dramatically in the past two decades that some are calling it an epidemic. The **Surgeon General** refers to America's escalating girth as “the terror within.”

Obesity has more negative **health consequences** than smoking, drinking, or poverty, according to a RAND study in *Health Affairs*. Consequences include the development of secondary (and costly) health conditions such as diabetes and heart disease.

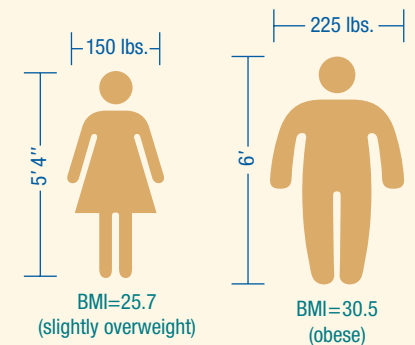
Body mass index explained

Two in three Americans are considered overweight or obese (as measured by body mass index—a height-to-weight calculation).



HEIGHT
WEIGHT

Examples:



Who is obese?

According to the latest statistics, 34.1% of Americans are overweight (BMI of 25 or more), 27.4% are obese (BMI of 30 to 39.9) and 4.8% are extremely obese (BMI of 40 or more).

If your workforce is **typical of American adults**, two-thirds of your employees are overweight or obese. The numbers are trending upward. In fact, the percentage of U.S. adults classified as obese doubled between 1980 and 2002.

Company Involvement

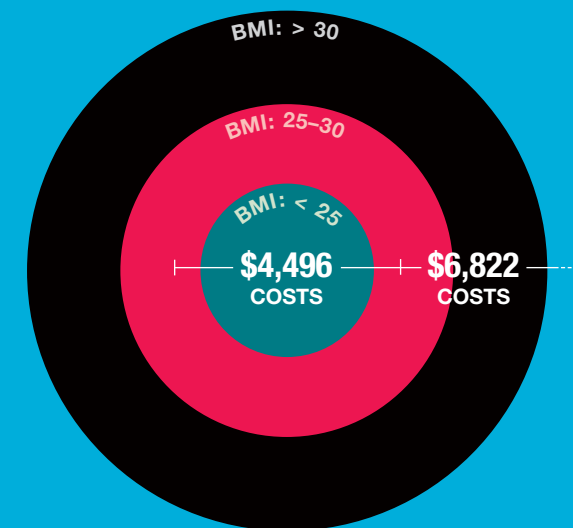
- Company Involvement
- Results
- Business Sense
- A Healthy Culture
- Choose a Program

Why should we help our employees lose and manage weight?

Better health truly does lead to a healthier bottom line. Not only will your employee weight-control initiative create goodwill among employees, you can—and should—expect measurable results.

A study by Dee W. Edington, PhD, of the University of Michigan and his colleagues was the first to examine the relationship between medical costs and the six weight groups defined by the National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute's weight guidelines (categories of underweight, healthy weight, overweight, and three different obesity designations based on body mass index).

Controlling weight and obesity-related health conditions “is especially important to corporations,” the study authors said, “where the percentage of revenue spent on medical benefits continues to increase.” Average annual medical costs were lowest for the healthy-weight group. Medical costs steadily increased as body mass index increased, for the most part regardless of gender or age. The goal is to keep low-risk employees at a healthy weight and assist higher-risk employees in lowering their weight—and even incremental drops mean dollars (and lives) saved.



- **An earlier study** by Wayne Burton, MD, and his colleagues looked at employees in a large financial institution. Analysis of costs over three years showed that employees with a BMI over 27 (considered overweight; obese = BMI over 30) had higher direct costs (\$6,822 compared with \$4,496 for employees not at risk) and more short-term disability.
- **Their conclusion:** Employers may benefit by helping employees maintain a healthy weight, and assist others to at least move in the direction of a lower body mass index. Target first those most at risk of complications from obesity—employees with BMIs over 30.

- Company Involvement
- Results
- Business Sense
- A Healthy Culture
- Choose a Program

There is no question that active, physically fit employees have better work performance. Researchers at Minneapolis-based Health Partners looked at health and lifestyle factors in 683 workers in various occupations using a health risk assessment. Obesity in 26.5% of those studied had a significant and negative effect (ill health, increased health costs, excess absences from work, and problem relationships in the workplace, for example). As physical fitness increased, so did the quantity and quality of work performed.

The Surgeon General makes it very clear in his **Call to Action to Prevent and Decrease Overweight and Obesity** that employers should encourage their employees to achieve and maintain a healthy body weight. Even a modest weight loss of 5 to 15% of body weight can significantly improve obesity-related conditions and promote better health.



No one questions the outcomes: lower the weight, lower the costs and enhance work performance.

Getting there—that’s the challenge. Whether you track your claims data or leave the heavy data lifting to other companies, follow the lead from successful corporate weight-loss and weight-management programs.

Create a corporate forum for behavior change

Weight loss and weight-management programs can easily be incorporated into an overall **corporate health promotion** strategy that taps into the corporate culture and makes it okay (and downright acceptable) to have awareness of weight issues and supportive weight-control programming as part of lifestyle improvement efforts companywide.

Because **group support** is a key motivator to successful weight control for many participants, the workplace is the ideal venue to promote behavior change. And, since most people spend the bulk of their waking hours at work, the work setting and co-workers provide built-in support systems and forums for behavior change.

Benefits of corporate initiatives extend well **beyond the workplace**. Working men and women who learn proper eating and exercise strategies will prepare and serve more healthful meals at home and be more active with their families. The hope is that tomorrow’s workforce, our children, can be helped to make smart eating decisions to stave off the growing childhood obesity problem today.

With the guidance provided here, HR managers, health promotion practitioners, medical directors, and occupational health personnel can roll up their sleeves and introduce successful weight-management programs within their benefits plans and worksite health initiatives. This report summarizes the most successful strategies to tackle corporate America’s growing weight issues.

Predicting success in weight-management programs

A great deal of research has been done on what constitutes an effective weight-management program. An expert panel convened by the Institute of Medicine outlined three predictors of success when starting a program (adapted from the Institute's report entitled *Weighing the Options*).

Predictors of success

1

A weight-loss program that **meets the employee's needs and desires**. An employee will choose a program based on his or her personal situation, such as readiness to change, convenience, and the cost and availability of a program. A weight-loss program offering onsite meetings in the workplace (for example, before or after work or during lunch) that employees are encouraged to attend will create greater weight-loss results for employees who elect to participate.

2

A weight-loss program **deemed to be safe and sound**. No hocus pocus. No outlandish claims. An employee will have success with programs that are proven to be based on sound biological and behavioral principles. Ongoing worksite programs in which employees can monitor their weight weekly and continue to assess their diet and physical activity patterns will help to maintain weight loss. This type of social support is invaluable in reinforcing behavior change. These types of onsite programs engage employees and are superior to do-it-yourself programs in which self-directed motivation (and lack of it) dooms many participants to fail.

3

A weight-loss program with **multiple measures of success**. The panel suggested that weight-loss programs be judged by how well participants do in terms of ALL these factors:

- **Long-term weight loss** (success occurs if participants have maintained weight loss a year or more, lost about 5% of body weight, or reduced body mass index by 1 or more units)
- **Improvement in lowering their risk** for weight-related conditions such as diabetes and heart disease (success is measured if doctors say participants have lowered their blood pressure or cholesterol or triglycerides or blood glucose and have control over type 2 diabetes significantly, which might mean reducing or stopping medications used to treat these conditions)

- Company Involvement
- Results
- Business Sense
- A Healthy Culture
- Choose a Program

- **Improved health practices** (for example, success occurs if participants have begun regular activity programs such as walking, or are participating in health screenings such as health fairs or having regular physical exams, and are meeting recommendations of MyPyramid.gov as measured by a dietary assessment tool)
- **Monitoring any ill effects** from the program itself (asking if participants have any changes in health while on the program because some do-it-yourself programs may potentially have adverse health effects)

Individual measures of success, as proposed by the panel, can mean just a 5% loss of body weight. This doesn't mean slimming down to wear the jeans worn in high school. It means a loss of body weight that begins progress toward health. Even modest weight losses can reduce the signs of metabolic syndrome, lower blood pressure and cholesterol (if too high) and reduce risk for heart disease. Less body weight can help control blood glucose (blood sugar) levels to prevent or delay diabetes in those with a condition known as prediabetes, or assist employees with type 2 diabetes control their blood sugar levels so that they may lower or remain off medication and control their conditions by diet and exercise alone.

If you are contracting with a provider of health promotion and weight-loss and weight-management programs, these are the measures of success, and bona fide vendors should be able to give you solid data to back up their claims.

Results

Short-term results

Corporate measures of success include tracking the number of employees (and dependents and retirees if included), adding up total number of pounds lost, logging the percentage of attendees who reach their interim weight goals and final weight goal, and following participants for one year or more to monitor long-term weight maintenance.

Leadership has to support healthy eating and fitness... walk the talk.

TIMOTHY CRIMMINS, MD,
Medical Director at General Mills

→ nutrition → exercise → psychology

- Company Involvement
- Results
- Business Sense
- A Healthy Culture
- Choose a Program

Total You at General Mills

EXAMPLE

General Mills helps employees manage their health through the “Total You” healthy lifestyle program. One recent initiative combined e-health and onsite programs to help employees live healthier. The result: a total weight loss of nearly 3,000 pounds.

Here’s how they did it. An initial short-term [10/10 Healthy Weight Program](#) (10 pounds in 10 weeks) rolled out to employees at corporate headquarters with a plan to take the program to other company sites.

Employees logged onto a customized Web site created by Mayo Clinic Health Management Resources for information and logging. The program was based on the idea that small behavioral changes are the way to lose weight, not fad diets. Employee participants were encouraged to [set realistic goals](#) online and adopt a positive attitude, according to Timothy Crimmins, MD, Medical Director at General Mills.

Throughout the 10-week program experts spoke on [nutrition, exercise](#), and the [psychology](#) of eating—reinforcing the online messages. During one of the 10 weeks, General Mills partnered with the American Cancer Society and Weight Watchers to observe the Great American Weigh In®.

One-third of the 1,300 participants lost an average of 6.7 pounds. Mayo Clinic provided General Mills with aggregate reports on number of site visits and weight tracking. One lucky employee won the big motivational prize—a spa vacation. High participation and completion rates are always boosted when [a valuable incentive](#) is offered.

The follow-up programs include a step-counter-based activity called Step Across America with Wheaties and a poster campaign to encourage employees to take the stairs.

“Leadership has to support healthy eating and fitness,” says Dr. Crimmins. A company that “walks the talk” among its employees is also moving its product portfolio toward whole-grain foods and promoting breakfast as a key to weight control for everyone.

- Company Involvement
- Results
- Business Sense
- A Healthy Culture
- Choose a Program

Long-term results

Your company must look at an investment in a weight-management program just like you would assess any capital investment. Only this time, the smart investment is in human capital.

Popular belief says that pounds lost are soon found again. Science seemed to support that theory. Dieters simply can't keep the pounds off, it was thought, and almost all weight lost can be expected to be regained over the course of the next five years, according to a 1992 report from the National Institutes of Health (NIH).

→ **But hold the presses.** In contrast, a 2003 study shows that when it comes to weight maintenance, how you lose the weight does matter in maintaining weight loss over time. This study examined people who attended Weight Watchers® meetings, achieved their weight goal and completed the six-week maintenance phase of the program. The national random sample showed that after two years, the participants had maintained 66% of their weight loss. After five years, the participants had maintained 48% of their weight loss.* These are excellent results.

→ **Why such great results?** The Weight Watchers program combines a science-based eating plan, behavior modification, regular activity and group support in weekly meetings that directly affect an individual's long-term weight-loss success. Through weekly meetings, the Weight Watchers program is designed to assist members in learning how to eat more healthfully, to increase their physical activity to burn calories, and to handle all the daily challenges and barriers encountered to achieve and maintain weight loss.

**Weight Watchers makes no claim that these results are representative of all participants in the Weight Watchers program. For many dieters, weight loss is temporary.*

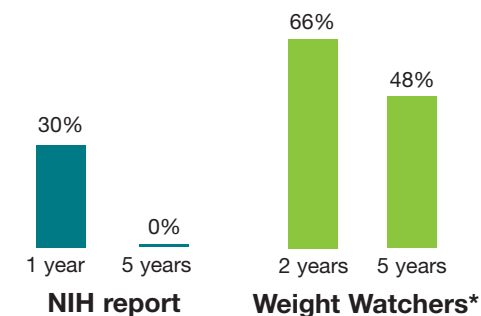
Sustainable weight loss is achievable



Michael Lowe, PhD, of Drexel University was the lead researcher on this study whose findings are in sharp contrast to the widely referenced National Institutes of Health report on a variety of weight-loss methods which indicated that the typical dieter completing a weight-loss program can expect to keep only one-third of the weight loss off one year later and that virtually all the weight is gained back in five years.

“These very important findings offer hope to a lot of people who had been discouraged about the sustainability of long-term weight loss,” said James M. Rippe, MD, director of the Rippe Lifestyle Institute and a leading authority regarding preventive cardiology, health and fitness, and healthy weight loss in the United States.

Percentage of weight loss that participants were able to keep off



- Company Involvement
- Results
- **Business Sense**
- A Healthy Culture
- Choose a Program

Business Sense

How can we rein in health care costs related to weight issues?

Companies—yours included—bear the financial burden of overweight and obese employees.

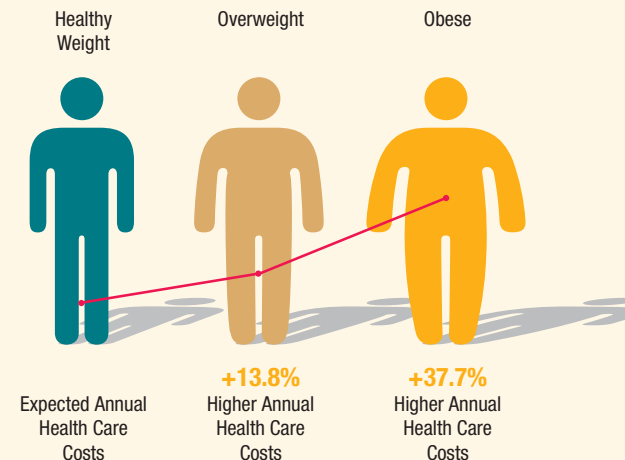
- For every \$100 spent in annual health care costs on a healthy-weight employee, employers spend 13.8% more on an overweight employee and 37.7% more on an obese employee.
- Employees with weight problems incur 36% higher annual health care costs, 39% higher costs for primary care visits, and 105% higher pharmacy costs for managing chronic conditions caused by their weight (such as high blood pressure, high cholesterol, diabetes, and heart disease).
- Obesity is associated with 39 million lost workdays per year.

Obesity leads to more than 320,000 deaths each year.

What are the complications of excess weight?

According to the American Obesity Association, obesity increases the risk of illness from about 30 serious conditions such as:

- Type 2 diabetes
- Heart disease
- High blood pressure
- Osteoarthritis (especially of the knee)
- Daytime sleepiness caused by sleep apnea at night
- Cancers, particularly of the breast, esophagus, colon, and rectum
- Metabolic syndrome



Assess your workforce needs and interests

A corporate weight-management program makes good business sense. Even if you've been there and done that in the past without much sustained success, you will want to revisit your approach. A corporate solution is now easier than you think. **First assess your workforce's needs** and interests and play to those strengths. If you choose a proven program that follows the Institute of Medicine's guidelines, you are virtually assured short-term success and long-term gain (well, loss!) over health care costs.

Key decision makers should include all the stakeholders within your company who can come together to assess your company's demographics, health claims data, and benefits plan. **Items to review** include these:

- Number of employees onsite and in remote locations (assume that, like the general population, about two-thirds are overweight or obese)
- Claims data related to weight issues (heart, diabetes, musculoskeletal issues, for example)
- Pharmacy benefits (especially medications related to weight issues, such as oral insulin)
- Dependents and retirees on your health plan (include them or not in your weight-management programs)
- Availability of onsite support facilities such as meeting rooms, cafeteria vendors, and fitness center
- Flexibility of supervisors to allow employees to attend onsite meetings, flex-time policies
- Benefits plan provisions or revisions to support weight loss such as medical savings accounts, rebates and incentives. (To explore tax advantages for your employees, see facing page.)

Tax implications for weight-loss programs

Participants in weight-loss programs may **deduct the cost** of the programs on their income taxes if their overall medical expenses exceed 7.5% of income in that year.

Employers may design their health plans to reimburse weight-loss program fees incurred to treat existing illness (such as obesity or hypertension, according to the IRS) when a physician has recommended weight loss to treat the illness. As with any benefit under a tax-qualified health plan, the employer may deduct the cost of funding the benefit, and the employee does not count the benefit as income.

In addition, if an employer offers a tax-qualified medical **flexible spending account** or **health reimbursement** arrangement, these plans may also reimburse weight-loss program fees if a physician has recommended weight loss to treat an existing illness. This can be coordinated with health plan payments if the health plan allows the reimbursement. For example, if the plan pays 80%, then the medical flexible spending plan can pick up the remaining 20%. If the health plan does not allow this kind of reimbursement, the medical flexible spending account plan or the health reimbursement arrangement may reimburse the full amount.

High-deductible health plans (typically offered as part of a consumer-directed health plan), which qualify enrollees to invest in a **health savings account**, can offer first-dollar reimbursement of eligible weight-loss program fees without losing their "high deductible" status.

- Company Involvement
- Results
- Business Sense
- **A Healthy Culture**
- Choose a Program

A Healthy Culture

How do we get started?



Foster a weight-healthy corporate culture

There is no single way to get employees to adopt weight-healthy habits. Intermittent efforts—such as the six-week weight-loss contest or 10-week team weigh-in—are not enough. What's needed is an awareness created at work where adults spend most of their waking hours and where they can be informed and influenced about making lifestyle choices.

American business pays the price

Obesity is estimated to cost American business more than \$13 billion per year in higher health care costs, lower productivity, increased absenteeism, and other consequences of illness due to overweight.

Lifestyle change isn't a quick fix.

It's a long-term movement through the stages of change, from contemplation to action and then lifelong maintenance, whether it's weight loss or quitting smoking or physical activity. Therefore, employers must make a year-round corporate commitment in support of lasting lifestyle change. Ideally, success becomes a way of life and an ongoing work style. You, as health educator, can change the corporate culture for the better—rather than pushing a short-term campaign on the disease du jour, on and off during the year.

Whatever program you choose, own it. Name your program to give it life! Involve the members of your wellness committee—representatives of all employee groups—to create a similar identity for your weight-loss and weight-management programs. Such involvement begins with an awareness campaign (newsletters, recruiting members, single-session informational meetings and sign up).

Increased awareness will help ensure that your weight programs keep going—because not every employee who needs it is ready at any single point in time. You want your program to be up and running at that teachable moment and ongoing to provide continuing support.

Don't presume that weight management takes place somewhere else (at home, at restaurants, in grocery stores). Weight-management occurs in your workplace.



Integrate your weight-healthy culture

- Make weight health a core part of your employee health promotion program.
- Use voluntary health risk appraisals to obtain baseline data about your workforce as part of long-term wellness planning. Then integrate specific information (such as number of overweight and obese employees, number of employees with diabetes and heart disease, number of employees expressing interest in weight loss) as you plan your weight-loss programming.
- Build support into your benefits program, such as incentives and/or reimbursement.
- Reexamine and update your company policies on flex time and work release time to attend onsite meetings.
- Support employee sports teams and physical activities.
- Integrate weight health into various facets of the daily work environment including the food service (cafeteria/vending/catering). Require your vendors and caterers to provide nutritional information for cafeteria selections.
- Provide guidance on local restaurants/fast food/catering options (using Web resources or dining out guides).
- Support practical opportunities for physical activity during the workday (promote the value of taking the stairs, suggest walking paths or routes for lunch or breaks, establish activity groups).
- Encourage fitness interest groups in the workplace and outside (for example, promote community activities and sports, family leagues and outings).



Communicate your weight-healthy message

- Incorporate healthy weight messages into all employee communications: print and electronic publications, intranet site or benefits page on your corporate intranet, email tips, posters and flyers, fitness center displays, kiosks, table tents in the cafeteria, signage in key locations throughout the company, and in voice-mail greetings for wellness staff.
- Communicate the positive impact of weight health on the workplace to managers and employees (perhaps an annual rundown of cost savings and measures of employee health/success, for example, increased competitiveness in the marketplace, fewer overall staff sick days).

Educate employees to create awareness

- Build a take-one literature display provided by leading health organizations such as the American Cancer Society, American Diabetes Association and American Heart Association on the benefits of maintaining a healthy weight and reducing risk for chronic conditions.
- Invite employees to attend onsite health/weight-related screenings during the year.
- Educate employees about portion sizes and healthy meal ideas. Use onsite food services to support employees in their weight loss or maintenance efforts.
- Periodically invite guest speakers from the community (for example, a registered dietitian or personal trainer).
- Tap into your internal communication vehicles (newsletters, e-letters, intranet, email, posters, bulletin boards, flyers, mass voice messaging, TV/video displays, signs).



- Company Involvement
- Results
- Business Sense
- **A Healthy Culture**
- Choose a Program



Provide incentives

- Create an incentive (for example, partial or full reimbursement for attendance at company-sponsored weight-loss programs; attendance on paid work time).
- Offer employees a discounted or free subscription to a lifestyle magazine such as *Prevention*, *Weight Watchers Magazine* or *Mayo Clinic HealthQuest*. Alternatively, provide issues of these publications in public areas and employee lounges.
- Make weight health a source of pride for your employees. Create avenues for internal recognition (in company newsletters) as well as external (publicity, formal acknowledgment/commendation from the company CEO).
- Highlight weight-healthy role models among all levels of staff.
- Keep employee rewards consistent with healthy weight by serving healthful food selections (for example, at company-sponsored celebrations, picnics, annual meetings, daily meetings, cafeteria choices).
- Consider an allowance (or reimbursement or discounted rate) for health club memberships.

How to offer healthful food at work— a helpful guide

Donuts at the breakfast meeting, rich chocolate cake for a co-worker's birthday, pasta salad soaked in oil for the lunch seminar: the state of nutrition in the workplace is grim. How can health promoters make a difference and support employees in their weight-loss efforts if you don't practice sound nutrition companywide?

To provide guidelines in such situations, faculty at the University of Minnesota's School of Public Health developed suggestions for offering healthy foods at meetings, seminars, and catered events (consistent with the USDA and HHS 2005 Dietary Guidelines for Americans).

The guidelines include suggestions for shaping healthy eating in the workplace, alternative options for food served at meetings and seminars, comparisons of healthy versus unhealthy foods, and caloric and fat information on popular food and beverage items. Some of the suggestions include offering healthy food choices such as **fruit**, **mini-muffins** and **mini-bagels**, **whole grain selections**, and **skim milk**, along with much **smaller portions**.

Also, the guidelines suggest **not providing food at mid-morning or mid-afternoon meetings, presentations, and seminars**—a suggestion that seems like an obviously healthy one, but would be a major shift in culture for some workplaces.



For more information, download and print the free resource document at www.ahc.umn.edu/ahc_content/colleges/sph/sph_news/nutrition.pdf

- Company Involvement
- Results
- Business Sense
- A Healthy Culture
- Choose a Program

Choose a Program

Which weight-management program works best in your worksite?

Choose one that gives sustainable weight loss, is comprehensive, and best suits your employees and your company configuration.

Today's American workplace is not normally just a single-site, corporate headquarters building. Many companies have satellite offices, remote employees, independent contractors, home workers, traveling sales teams, retail outlets, and international locations connected to the home office electronically, not to mention scores of dependents and retirees who are covered by your company health plan. The challenge is how to get healthy weight messages to them efficiently and cost effectively.

Since research shows that people who attend structured meetings lose more weight than people dieting on their own, it is clear that for those who cannot attend an onsite meeting, encouraging attendance at a weight-management program in their local communities is a good solution. And, for those who cannot attend meetings, you'll want to integrate other options to reach them, such as access to an online subscription, or a kit sent to them at home.

Weight Watchers International, Inc. is a leading example of a commercial weight-loss company that offers sustainable weight-loss results. It makes the most of the worksite environment where employees can support each other, and is a comprehensive approach including diet, exercise, behavior modification and, for those attending meetings, group support. Weight Watchers Corporate Solutions can fit into your weight-management program by providing access to weekly meetings both on and off site*, as well as options for Online subscriptions and At Home kits*.

*Available only in participating areas in the U.S.

At work, at home, online, and in local communities—meeting the needs of all participants

With offerings from Weight Watchers, **Raytheon**, a defense and aerospace company, provides employees with successful and safe weight-management options. Employees can choose from four options: Local Meeting vouchers, Online subscription, the At Home kit or the At Work meeting. At Work meetings are offered at 23 locations. **Employees register for the At Work meetings telephonically and are able to pay for their 26-week series through payroll deduction.** The Weight Watchers offerings at Raytheon are integrated with other health and wellness initiatives. Participants are encouraged to join the onsite fitness centers, dining centers provide healthy “Balanced Choices” that are marked and have nutritional information available, and onsite nurses provide blood pressure screenings and other health counseling. Since Weight Watchers launched the enhanced At Work meetings in June 2005, Raytheon employees have lost over 7,000 pounds and satisfaction with the offering has been extremely high.

EXAMPLE

Improving Employee Health

CSX Transportation operates the largest rail network in the eastern United States. As part of their Health and Wellness program, Weight Watchers offers At Work meetings in 12 cities in their larger locations along with Local Meeting vouchers for community meetings, Weight Watchers Online subscriptions and At Home kits.

“We believe that behavior change is initiated and sustained with the support of the entire family. That is why we also provide support for our employees and their spouses.”

—Kenneth A. Glover, MS, RCEP, CSCS
Health and Wellness Manager
CSX Medical Department

Research supports the value of Weight Watchers successful meeting format.

A study published in *JAMA* compared structured, commercial weight-loss sessions (a food and activity plan with behavior modification, supported by weekly meetings) with self-help programs (two short counseling sessions plus self-help resources). The structured meetings provided more weight loss than self-help over the two-year study period.

At Work meetings conveniently deliver Weight Watchers to employees at the worksite. A minimum number of employees must be enrolled, but often, separate companies may pool their interested employees within an office park or building.

Meetings tap into the **power of group support**. Onsite meetings create a community within your workforce that benefits both your company and your employees—and ultimately the employees' families. A weekly 30- to 45-minute meeting held during the workday (or before or after work) gives your company full-time benefits because the workplace becomes its own supportive environment for healthy weight.

At Work meetings are **cost efficient, time efficient, and convenient**. Millions of participants have lost weight with Weight Watchers in the company's over 40-year history, and the Weight Watchers approach has stood the test of time as being a safe, nutritionally sound approach to good health.

Take Charge of Your Health!

EXAMPLE

At **Verizon Wireless**, having healthy and productive employees is part of their corporate culture, with 23 in-house health and wellness centers with gym facilities offering one-on-one training, and a comprehensive wellness program that includes nutrition advice, CPR training, flu shots and cholesterol screenings.

Verizon Wireless successfully incorporated Weight Watchers into its health and wellness program for both employees and their families by offering At Work meetings to its employees for 15 years, and adding Weight Watchers Online subscriptions at the end of 2002. For those employees who participate in Weight Watchers and reach their target weight, Verizon Wireless offers a \$100 rebate through their health care provider.

- Company Involvement
- Results
- Business Sense
- A Healthy Culture
- Choose a Program

Trained Leaders

Once your company commits to an At Work meeting and recruits participants, Weight Watchers provides trained Leaders who are successful role models to stimulate discussion and inspire life-changing results. Your task is to decide on popular meeting times and locate available space for your onsite meetings. Weight Watchers helps you publicize the meetings and recruit attendees who are ready to make a lifestyle change. Employees may join mid-series, and the meetings can be held continuously year-round at your worksite as long as there are enough participants. Soon you'll have your own success stories and weight loss statistics to bolster ongoing promotion efforts.

Administration

This onsite offering is easy to implement, unlike similar worksite- or community-based programs that might require a great deal of staff time to plan, promote, and present. Your company reaps the rewards as employees are motivated to lose weight and control their lifestyle choices. You decide who pays the fee—your employee, your company, or some combination.

Wisdom

Payroll deduction is a no-cost and very effective way to encourage more employees to enroll, raising your participation rate, and thereby your opportunity to lower health care costs. Employees often find it easier to enroll when the payment is deducted from their paychecks. Further, payroll deduction helps employees to commit long enough to achieve their weight goal and maintain their new healthier weight.

- Company Involvement
- Results
- Business Sense
- A Healthy Culture
- Choose a Program

Beyond At Work meetings,*† you can also offer:

- **Local meeting vouchers***: a prepaid savings plan that offers the flexibility of attending Weight Watchers meetings in local communities. This solution works for companies that want to help their employees lose weight but don't have enough employees to make an effective group onsite.
- **Online subscription**: good for those employees who cannot attend meetings, or who prefer a self-help option. This Internet product can be promoted and linked from your company's intranet, and an online gateway page can be co-branded with your company logo.
- **At Home kit***: provides information and resources to follow Weight Watchers step-by-step at home. The kit includes weight-loss tools and bonus products that are conveniently delivered to employees' homes, along with access to a Toll-free Helpline with weekly progress reporting.

**Available only in participating areas in the U.S. †Minimum enrollment required.*

EXAMPLE

American Standard Companies, a global manufacturer in air conditioning systems and services, bathroom and kitchen products, and vehicle control systems, has a comprehensive health and productivity strategy that focuses on improving the health status of employees and dependents; one important component of the strategy is weight management. They offer financial incentives that reduce employee medical plan contributions for those who are currently at or working towards a healthy body weight. The company supports weight loss of employees and family members in their more than 75 locations across the U.S. Many offer Weight Watchers on-site with significant subsidies and direct payroll deductions for the cost of meetings; others have also sponsored weight-reduction competitions culminating in the loss of thousands of pounds.

"Weight management is a win/win for our employees and the company. Weight loss can significantly improve an individual's health status and quality of life; the company benefits through reduced health care costs and absences, and increased productivity."

—Heidi Lattig, Health and Productivity Program Manager

Act now

It's a vicious cycle: Overweight employees are at higher risk for developing preventable lifestyle diseases and conditions such as high blood pressure, type 2 diabetes, and heart disease—even certain types of cancer. Weight and its hefty burden will weigh down your company's productivity and health care costs.

You can break the cycle by helping your employees lose and maintain a healthy weight. Even modest weight loss has been proven to reduce risk, and the importance of keeping low-risk employees at low risk cannot be overemphasized.

"Particularly during a time when obesity in the U.S. has hit such a dangerous mark, we must focus on long-term weight loss as a critical component to address this important national health issue and reverse this trend," said James M. Rippe, MD, Director of the Rippe Lifestyle Institute and a leading authority on preventive cardiology.

Worksite healthy-weight programs—delivered onsite, via Internet, by mail, or in the community—are a vital part of any company's health promotion efforts. Tackle this issue and start enjoying the benefits of a healthier workforce.

You can't afford not to.

Checklist for...

weight-management success



Corporate culture

Assess your workplace. What foods are served in your vending machines? Are healthful choices available? If not, are you empowered to change that? Who is? Can employees make healthful choices in your company cafeteria? Do you have nutritional information posted, a daily “Smart Choice” meal, subsidy for healthier choices, or free fruit? Can healthier choices be served at company meetings? What is the informal “way things are around here” for birthday and other celebrations? Are the break rooms filled with candy and high-fat baked goods? Can you influence a healthier choice (or no food at all) for certain events?



Logistics

If your worksite isn't large enough to support ongoing weight-management meetings, can you partner with other businesses in your building, office park or area to attract a minimum number of employees for a support group (about 20)? What opportunities does your work environment offer for employees to be active during the workday, such as an onsite or nearby fitness center, subsidy to join, a negotiated discount, and encouragement to walk and form groups?



Environmental assessment

Is your workplace conducive to promoting activity with such amenities as lighted and accessible stairways? Bike racks? Lockers? Are microwaves and refrigerators available for employees who bring food from home? Do employees have access to computers, a company intranet, email, kiosks, and newsletters to promote and market your program? Can you arrange meeting rooms? Are you operating in a 24/7 shiftwork environment? Can you tap into company resources for support for health promotion efforts (for example, human resources, graphics, communication, PR, facilities management)?



Employee needs assessment

Do you regularly poll your employees on worksite issues? Build in such questions as: “Would you participate in an onsite weight-management program?” “What is the most convenient time for you to participate in an onsite weight-management group: before work, after work, during lunch?” “Would you like to be notified if we organize an onsite weight-management program?” “Would you attend weight-loss programs in the community, away from work?” “Do you have computer access at home? If so, would you be receptive to an online, self-paced weight-management program?” “Are you trying to lose weight?” “Are you trying to maintain a healthy weight?” Follow up and follow through.



Management support

Does your workplace offer flex time for employees to attend onsite meetings? Are supervisors receptive to allowing employees to attend? Is it acceptable in your workplace for employees to form groups in support of each other? Do you have HR policies that support your plan? Can you find a senior-level manager to champion your cause?



Health risk assessment

Assess your risks. Do you conduct an annual or biannual health risk assessment? Does it gather valuable information about employees' weight, weight issues, and risks? Does that information drive your health programming? Can you work with your health services vendor to measure risks associated with weight so you can generate an aggregate picture of your workforce for programming purposes?



Claims analysis

Find out your real costs. Have you ever done a claims analysis on weight-related health costs? Will your health insurer or data warehouse give you aggregate data so you can measure just how much weight-related claims cost your company? Track your data over time—and especially before and after your weight-awareness interventions.



Benefits plan

Can you build a subsidy under your benefits plan to (1) share the costs for weight-management programs with your employees/dependents/retirees? (2) reimburse costs after completion or other time period of successful weight-management? (3) pick up the entire cost (not recommended)? Does your benefits plan cover employees who seek medical care for weight-related issues (weight-loss program fees, registered dietitian consultations, bariatric surgery, for example)?



Program promotion

Once you choose a vendor for your weight-management program, what avenues do you have for marketing and promoting the program? Online via company intranet, email, interoffice mail, mail sent to employees at home (to reach dependents), posters, flyers, newsletter articles? What in-house resources do you have to help (PR department, graphics, information systems, HR support, all-employee committee, senior-level champions)?



Coordinate support services

Coordinate your vendor's weight-loss services with other health promotion and disease management support services your company offers employees. Examples are your overall health promotion initiatives such as walking clubs, fitness center, smoking cessation classes, diabetes education, online health information delivery, and health fairs. Is your employee assistance program (EAP) on board with your weight-management program coordinators so cross referrals can be made? Sometimes other "issues" need to be addressed long before an employee tackles his or her weight. Similarly, is the weight-loss group leader equipped to make referrals to your EAP or fitness center? Is your nurseline aware of the weight-management program schedule? Does your fitness center staff know when and where classes are held? Is your newsletter vendor coordinating articles with program start dates? Bottom line: Make sure everyone providing health promotion support services knows about all the other health programs available and will work synergistically—not separately.

References

American Obesity Association. Obesity in the U.S. Accessed at www.obesity.org.

Burton, WN, Chen C, Schultz AB, Edington DW. The economic costs associated with body mass index in a workplace. *JOEM*. 1998 Sept;40(9):786-92.

Finkelstein EA, Fiebelkorn IC, Wang G. National medical spending attributable to overweight and obesity: how much, and who's paying? *Health Affairs*. Web Exclusive. May 14, 2003. <http://content.healthaffairs.org/cgi/content/full/hlthaff.w3.219v1/DC1>.

Heshka S, Anderson JW, Atkinson RL, Greenway FL, Hill JO, Phinney SD, Kolotkin RL, Miller-Kovach K, Pi-Sunyer FX. Weight loss with self-help compared with a structured commercial program: a randomized trial. *JAMA*. 2003 Apr 9;289(14):1792-8.

Institute of Medicine. *Weighing the Options: Criteria for Evaluating Weight-Management Programs*. National Academy Press, 1995.

Knowler WC, Barrett-Connor E, Fowler SE, Hamman RF, Lachin JM, Walker EA, Nathan DM; Diabetes Prevention Program Research Group. Reduction in the incidence of type 2 diabetes with lifestyle intervention or metformin. *N Engl J Med*. 2002 Feb 7;346(6):393-403.

Lowe MR, Thaw J. Long-term maintenance of weight loss among dieters reaching their goal weight while attending Weight Watchers meetings. Presented at the European Association for the Study of Obesity, Prague, May 2004.

Mokdad AH, Marks JS, Stroup DF, Gerberding JL. Correction: actual causes of death in the United States, 2000. *JAMA* 2005 Jan 19;293(3):293-4.

NIH Technology Assessment Conference Panel. Methods for voluntary weight loss and control. *Ann Intern Med*. 1992 Jun 1;116(11):942-9.

Ogden CL, Carroll MD, Curtin LR, McDowell MA, Tabak CJ, Flegal KM. Prevalence of Overweight and Obesity in the United States, 1999-2004. *JAMA*. 2006;295:1549-1555.

Pronk NP, Martinson B, Kessler RC, Beck AL, Simon GE, Wang P. The association between work performance and physical activity, cardio-respiratory fitness, and obesity. *JOEM*. 2004 Jan;46(1):19-25.

Rippe JM, Price JM, Hess SA, et al. Improved psychological well-being, quality of life, and health practices in moderately overweight women participating in a 12-week structured weight loss program. *Obesity Research* 1998;6(3):208-18.

Sturm R. The effects of obesity, smoking, and drinking on medical problems and costs. Obesity outranks both smoking and drinking in its deleterious effects on health and health costs. *Health Affairs*, 2002 Mar-Apr;21(2):245-53.

Surgeon General. *The Surgeon General's Call to Action to Prevent and Decrease Overweight and Obesity*. 2001.

Thompson D, et al. Body mass index and future healthcare costs: A retrospective cohort study. *Obesity Research*, 2001;9(3):210-18.

U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. *Prevention Makes Common Cents: Estimated Economic Costs of Obesity to U.S. Business*. 2003.

Washington Business Group on Health (now National Business Group on Health). *Best Practices and Strategies for Weight Management: A Toolkit for Large Employers*. June 2003.

Witt, L. Why we're losing the war against obesity. *American Demographics*, Dec. 1, 2003.

Yen L, Edington MP, McDonald T, Hirschland D, Edington DW. Changes in health risks among the participants in the United Auto Workers—General Motors LifeSteps Health Promotion Program. *American Journal of Health Promotion*. 2001 Sep-Oct;16(1):7-15.

Weigh Your Options
→ Contributors

The National Business Group on Health (the Business Group), founded in 1974, is the only national nonprofit organization exclusively devoted to representing the perspective of large employers and providing practical solutions to its members' most important health care problems. Recognized as the leading voice of large employers, the Business Group represents over 240 members on their most important health issues. Business Group members are primarily Fortune 500 companies—including the nation's most innovative health care purchasers—who provide health coverage for more than 51 million U.S. workers, retirees, and their families. The Business Group fosters the development of a quality health care delivery system and treatments based on scientific evidence of effectiveness.

The Business Group has launched the **Institute on the Costs and Health Effects of Obesity** to tackle one of the nation's most serious, preventable health problems—the epidemic of obesity. The impact of obesity on business is significant at \$13 billion annually in direct health costs combined with the costs of disability, absenteeism and lost productivity. Companies today are paying about 8% more in health claims costs alone due to overweight and obesity. Leading corporations recognize that the prevention of even more alarming future costs must begin now.

Weight Watchers International, Inc., is America's trusted name in weight loss and the global leader in weight-loss services, with approximately 48,000 weekly meetings in 30 countries. To learn more about Weight Watchers Corporate Solutions, go to WeightWatchers.com/healthcaresavings or call 1-866-WW-4-WORK.

WEIGHT WATCHERS is a registered trademark of Weight Watchers International, Inc.

INSTITUTE ON
The Costs
AND **Health**
Effects
OF **Obesity**



WeightWatchers®
CorporateSolutions

Four circular icons are arranged horizontally below the text. From left to right: a purple circle with a white silhouette of a person walking; an orange circle with a white smartphone icon; a green circle with a white leaf icon; and a red circle with a white house icon.