

Organisations have aggressively cut costs to maintain profit during the downturn. Often one of the “costs” cut are corporate wellness initiatives. Yet, even today it is clear that corporate wellness can reduce costs and improve productivity. A recent Harvard Analysis identifies an average ROI of \$3.27 for every \$1 invested in wellness due to improved employee health, engagement and reduction in medical claims.

In this Resilience Insight we team up weight management with resilience to focus on how healthy weight and smart nutrition can optimise engagement, performance and creativity. For responsible leaders who recognise optimal employee health and return on investment as a global competitive advantage, we have developed some simple and practical implementation tips to help attract, make and keep the current workforce engaged, productive and resilient.

Lose weight or lose business?

“Flab is out!” Lean organisations are built on healthy people

The rate of obesity - 17% across the OECD region - has more than doubled over the past 20 years. A recent study in England forecasts that total costs linked to overweight and obesity could increase by as much as 70% by 2015. In the workplace, medical benefits for overweight employees cost up to 42% more on average than the medical benefits of those employees in the healthy weight range.

According to a study published in the Journal of Occupational and Environmental Medicine, issues associated with obesity account for over 9% of the total costs of absenteeism in the workplace. This is largely because cardiovascular disease, diabetes, hypertension, sleep issues, injury, respiratory disorders and certain cancers are all more common in overweight or obese people.

Excess weight can cause psychological problems such as anxiety, depression and low self-esteem as well as the often ignored weight discrimination, which has increased at an estimated 66% over the past ten years. According to a study in the Journal of Obesity, this is comparable to racial bias in the workplace.

Through healthy weight management, organisations can build resilience, leading to decreased costs and improved productivity.

At work: the perfect setting

Weight management in the workplace is effective, efficient and fun. Organisations can make a difference.

According to the World Health Organisation (WHO), 60% to 85% of people in the world lead sedentary lifestyles, making it one of the more serious yet insufficiently addressed public health problems of our time.

Our work site environments have become more sedentary over the years, through the shift from an agricultural to a service based economy and urbanisation. This has had a direct effect on our weight. One study found that the more time employees spent at their desks, the greater their odds of being overweight. The combination of sedentary jobs, poor eating habits, an abundance of energy rich foods and workload pressure make maintaining a normal weight a challenge.

Since the majority of the week is spent at work, on-site weight management programmes with co-workers create a great network for on-going support and motivation.

Think quality & eat smart

Good nutrition is good business and a sound investment. Proper nutrition leads to gains in productivity and worker morale.

Nutrition is an essential resource to manage our

physical vitality and weight. However, we sometimes underestimate that nutritional choices also have an impact on our emotional state, our intellectual abilities and ultimately, our performance. The Resilience Institute calls this interdependence “The Performance Supply Chain”.

The Performance Supply Chain

When you are energised and present (body), emotionally engaged (heart), mentally focused (mind) and guided by clear values (spirit), your performance is optimised.



On a daily basis, we are fuelling our brain with nutrients that could either enhance or hinder our alertness, our concentration, our memory and our ability to think effectively.

“What is good for the heart is also good for the brain,” Alzheimer’s Association.

A typical brain accounts for just 2% of our body’s total mass, but it uses 20% of the oxygen and 25% of calories taken in. Glucose is critical to sustain brainpower, so clean arteries and healthy levels of blood glucose are essential.

Overnight we burn our liver glycogen supply and need to replace energy to sustain brain glucose levels. We “Break-the-fast” to supply brain power. If not we shut down parts of the brain. However, 4 out of 10 people skip breakfast. A study from the Sussex Innovation Centre, Brighton UK, found that eating breakfast improves people’s mental performance. Breakfast eaters also showed a reduction in anxiety levels when faced with stressful situations. Breakfast eaters tend to weigh less than breakfast skippers. Skipping breakfast has been associated with overweight and obesity.

Omega-3 fats (fish, fish oil and flaxseed) are good for the brain too. A growing body of research suggests that a diet rich in omega 3 fatty acids may help lower the risk of developing Alzheimer’s disease, depression, and some types of cancer. Our brain is 60% fat. Omega-6 oils in soy, peanuts, pumpkin seeds or corn oil may also help. However, recent food trends tend to over emphasise omega 6 which when taken in excess can counter affect omega 3 benefits.

Vitamin D from sunshine, fatty fish and eggs contributes to mood and cognitive performance. Vegetables, rice, and whole-grains provide the low glycemic index carbohydrates best suited to cognitive performance. They contain the vitamin B group which supports memory. Quality over quantity should guide our choices.

For concentration and mood: protein and regular meals



Our ability to focus can be affected by specific foods, as well as the timing and volume of meals and snacks. Our presence, which is a critical component of leadership, is determined through our ability to control our attention, our focus and our mood. Stable glucose supply is the key.

Low blood glucose often leads to reduced attention and focus, sleepiness, irritability and impulsive behaviour followed by negative impact and regret. However, when too much food is consumed at once, our digestion can monopolise our energy, leaving us with an unpleasant feeling of heaviness. Overeating processed and simple carbohydrates like sweet snacks, cakes or cookies can lead to an energy spike followed by a crash causing lethargy, irritability and cravings.

Eating nutritious food on a regular basis is an enjoyable experience boosting positive mood and presence. Food with a high satiety value like protein, high fibre foods, whole-grains, and vegetables (beans, peas) or bananas can help extend the time between meals and the amount of food needed to stop hunger. In addition, eating high satiety and regularly can reduce the overall number of calories consumed in a day, resulting in weight loss.

Neurotransmitters are chemicals that stimulate neuronal connections. Proteins affect these neurotransmitters in two ways. Stimulant proteins contain tyrosine - for example tofu, tuna, turkey or yoghurt - that supports alertness and concentration. These are not ideal before sleep but appear to be beneficial for breakfast or before a challenge.

Calming proteins including tryptophan found in dairy, soy, poultry, whole grains, rice, beans or peanuts relax the brain. These may be better at night to support sleep. Both tyrosine and tryptophan have been associated with a better ability to cope with stress.

Here is your opportunity

According to Hewitt's 2008 Two Roads Diverged survey, 8 out of 10 employees, regardless of weight, believe weight management programmes belong at

work. This creates an opportunity for employers to expand their weight management and nutrition education programmes within the workplace.

Healthy weight management and resilient nutrition are important parts of sustainable performance

Our surroundings have changed dramatically and with them our behaviour. Given that we spend more than 1/3 of our daily lives at work, a great opportunity is

presented to deal with weight management and nutrition. It is essential for organisations to prioritise a wellness strategy of which weight management and smart nutrition can be the core.

Conclusion

"With access to over 54% of the global adult population, employers are well positioned to make a valuable contribution by taking measures to improve the health of their workforce," Workplace Wellness Alliance.

Workplace wellness initiatives deliver value on two fronts; they decrease costs and improve performance. Promoting healthy nutrition can help optimise the physical, emotional and cognitive health of a workforce. Responsible leaders can build a healthy foundation for business success.

By creating behavioural change in the workplace, we can also improve health for all by encouraging behavioural change in individuals, families and communities. Named "Resilient Dynamism", this topic has been recognised as a global priority at the World Economic Forum in Davos.

Start today and experience how you can use nutrition and weight management to keep operating successfully and create a sustainable workforce that can engage the challenges ahead and create dynamic solutions!

Healthy weight management and resilient nutrition are important parts of sustainable performance. The

The time has come for leaders to advocate health as an investment, both for individuals and for organisations.

Employees are ready. How about you?

Practical tips

1. Lead by the example! Eat well and radiate positive energy.
2. Always have fruit or pre-packaged nuts (+/- 10 nuts per pack) in your bag, desk or car as a healthy snack.
3. Always keep 1 litre of water available nearby.
4. Create awareness and engage support. Share this article with key decision makers
5. Contact your Human Resources and/or Medical Professionals to assess the opportunity to increase employees' awareness on these topics.
6. Ensure availability of healthy options at your cafeteria, vending machines etc...

7. Consider partnering with The Resilience Institute to design the best empowerment programme or your team.

“The constitutions and the habits of a people follow the nature of the land where they live” Hippocrates

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