

How Wellness Apps Are Enhancing Workplace Benefits

With 7 out of 10 employees believing their employers have responsibility for their wellbeing, wellness programs, especially apps, can help organizations encourage active lifestyles, improve productivity and worker satisfaction.

By Lynn Giles

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Human resource professionals should consider wellness apps that create healthier employees and tangible organizational benefits.

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Wellness Programs and Apps Enhance Workplace Benefits

Key Findings:

- Wellness programs have evolved into easy-to-use apps and are taking employee health to the next level.
- Utilizing wellness apps makes it easier to engage and incentivise employees and reduce their stress.
- Wellness apps create healthier employees and can have bottom-line results.

Introduction

Employer-provided wellness programs have existed for over a century, with early initiatives including the eight-hour workday and programs designed to reduce worksite accidents. More recently, employers are looking for new ways to initiate wellness programs that are simple to implement, create healthier employees and become sought-after benefits to attract and retain talent.

Research shows that employees want employers to help promote good health in the workplace.¹





- Approximately 70% of employees report that their employer is responsible for ensuring their employees are mentally, physically and financially well.
- 3 in 4 workers trust their employer to help them improve their overall well-being through quality benefits and offerings.

Programs that utilize methods to increase and incentivize healthier activities lead to healthier living (especially for at-risk employees), reduced medical expenses and decreased healthcare costs.

In a post-pandemic workforce, employees have come to expect on-demand access to everything they need, and this includes the tools and resources of wellness programs. These programs are becoming even more flexible, adaptable and personal, which leads to more engaged employees and better health outcomes.

“A wellness program should be available continuously 24 hours a day, seven days a week.” said Bryce Rausch, Head of Sales, Fitbit Enterprise.



Benefits of Wellness Programs

The benefits of wellness programs are far-reaching, according to multiple government studies. The Centers for Disease Control's Workplace Health Resource Center, for example, found that employees in good health are more likely to deliver optimal performance in the workplace. Additionally, healthy employees have a better quality of life and also benefit from having a lower risk of disease, illness and injury. It can also lead to increased work productivity and a greater likelihood of contributing to their communities.²

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The Evolution of Wellness Data and Ease of Use

Previous wellness program data was generated at a single moment in time, such as during annual physicals or health risk surveys, said Bryce Rausch, Head of Sales for the fitness technology company, Fitbit Enterprise, now a part of Google. This approach made it more difficult for employers to understand the health trends of their workforce. At the same time, employees need to know if newly adopted health habits were improving their health.

Today's wellness apps, however, are using real-time data to address many health metrics – giving them a more accurate and actionable representation of their health. One study cited Fitbit as “among the most accurate commercially available wearables,” and noted that the study arms of the interventions that included Fitbit (versus those that did not) produced:

- Statistically significant increase in daily step count;
- An increase in moderate-to-vigorous physical activity; and
- A decrease in weight.

The apps are also making outcomes simpler and more accessible. In the past, a person might only learn about their sleep health by entering a sleep lab. That's changed dramatically with apps such as Fitbit, according to Rausch.



“Fitbit can quickly give users data about sleep quality, including time spent awake or in REM, Light or Deep sleep stages,” said Rausch. “And when they wish to improve their sleep, they can join a sleep program within Fitbit Premium, which helps them set a doable, weekly goal based on their sleep data to impact their time asleep and their daily sleep score.”

A recent pilot program between the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs and Fitbit included 50 float pool nurses who volunteered to test out the incorporation of Fitbits into their work unit and daily routine.³

Since the start of the pilot, administrators saw a reduction in nurses calling out within this workgroup, which has led to a decrease in staffing issues and overall, healthier and more well-rested nurses reporting for duty each day. The pilot also promotes whole health aspects such as providing staff with the opportunity to participate in activities like stretching exercises, adult coloring, aromatherapy and more.

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Use Wellness Apps to Reduce Stress, Engage and Incentivise Employees

Workplace stress has long been a negative factor on employee wellness. One study found that employees who typically feel stressed during the workday are more than three times as likely to change jobs in the next year (71% vs. 20%).⁴



Experts say that when steps are taken to collectively help employees manage and reduce stress, overall company wellness improves. Additional research found that people who participate in group exercise versus independent exercise had a 26% reduction in stress and “significantly improved” their quality of life.⁵

“Wellness programs help to maintain social connections between employees by encouraging healthy behaviors,” said Aleksandro Grabulov, Lead Product Manager, Fitbit Enterprise.



Grabulov notes three best practices in wellness programs that help to empower and engage employees:

- Create a program focused on holistic health. Employees are different with varying goals and priorities. Allow them to choose which fits best for them.
- Wellness programs should be available continuously 24 hours a day, seven days a week. Employees expect on-demand access to the tools and resources of wellness programs.
- The program should be flexible, adaptable and personal. It needs to adapt and feel personal, which helps improve program retention and lead to better health outcomes.

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There are several ways human resources and benefits professionals can help employees engage with wellness programs and apps:

- Subsidize devices for employees.
- Measure engagement and activity to add secondary benefits (e.g., accessories or next device discount coupons).
- Offer discount codes that employees can use for friends and family when they achieve activity goals.
- Create company-wide challenges for specific activities and link those to awards or incentives.
- Form “closed communities” to engage directly using group messaging, awareness campaigns and corporate challenges.



Wellness Apps Create Healthier Employees and Have Bottom-line Results

Having healthier employees is more than a feel-good goal. The Society for Human Resource Management (SHRM) emphasized the importance of wellness programs as a result of a recent survey.

The non-profit found that well-executed wellness programs “can reduce health care costs, augment productivity and increase employee retention, providing further support for the correlation between personal health and job satisfaction.” SHRM also found that 46% of employers responded “very important” or “extremely important” to the need for a wellness benefits category.⁶

Fitbit’s Rausch added that “healthy employees are less likely to miss work for illness or suffer from workplace injuries. And they are less likely to incur ongoing and expensive healthcare and medical prescription bills.”

Another survey found that 85% of companies say wellness programs support employee engagement, which can drive positive perception, affecting both recruitment and retainment.⁷



Most North American employers saved \$1 to \$3 in their overall health care costs for every dollar spent on an employee wellness program.

“Employers Save Up to Three Dollars for Every Dollar Spent,” International Foundation of Employee Benefit Plans.



There are also strong numbers behind wellness programs. The International Foundation of Employee Benefit Plans determined that most North American employers saved \$1 to \$3 in their overall health care costs for every dollar spent on an employee wellness program. The savings came from direct costs, such as workers' compensation claims, and indirect costs, like improved retention and increased productivity.⁸

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Key Takeaways

The benefits of healthy lifestyle and wellness programs and apps are numerous. Employees want their companies to offer these programs to help improve their health and wellbeing. Employers can also benefit from these programs in numerous ways:

- Encouraging employees to have better health outcomes and reduce stress levels—potentially reducing medical and related expenses.
- Promoting a positive perception of an organization, which can lead to improved employee satisfaction, recruitment and retention.
- Boosting productivity and creating a more engaged and collaborative workforce.

For more information about the family of Fitbit products, including Fitbit Premium, please visit: <https://enterprise.fitbit.com>

¹ “[2021 Workplace Wellness Survey](#).” EBRI. October 7, 2021.

² “[Engaging Employees in Their Health and Wellness](#).” Centers for Disease Control Workplace Health Resource Center.

³ “[OVACHS Pilots Fitbit Innovation to Benefit Employees](#).” Department of Veterans Affairs. March 30, 2022.

⁴ “[The American Workforce Faces Compounding Pressure](#).” American Psychological Association. 2021.

⁵ “[Researchers Find Group Exercise Improves Quality of Life and Reduces Stress Far More Than Individual Exercise](#).” The Journal of the American Osteopathic Association. 2017.

⁶ “[2022 Employee Benefits Survey: Designing and Managing Wellness Programs](#).” Society for Human Resources Management. June 12, 2022.

⁷ “[The Business of Healthy Employees](#).” Virgin Pulse Survey Report. 2017.

⁸ “[Employers Save Up to Three Dollars for Every Dollar Spent](#).” International Foundation of Employee Benefit Plans.





enterprise.fitbit.com