

# The case for on-site workplace wellness





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## Why Wellness in the Workplace?

53% of companies have some sort of wellness program, and 8% are planning to add one this year<sup>1</sup>. Although some organizations view this as simply a perk, many others are implementing wellness into their overall employee strategy. These strategies seek to utilize wellness programs to cultivate workforce that is less stressed, more focused and healthier overall. Studies show this is possible.

- A UC Davis study showed that **cortisol levels** (stress indicators) were **reduced** in mindful practitioners<sup>2</sup>
- A University of Wisconsin research team found that workers who meditated had **more antibodies** in their blood stream- that is, they were better able to fight off illness<sup>3</sup>
- 89% of General Mills employees said they became **better listeners** with mindfulness training<sup>4</sup>
- At one of Welnys' corporate clients, employees were surveyed after a chair massage. 100% enjoyed their session. 100% felt less tense after their massage. 61.5% reported feeling better throughout the rest of their workday.

## Hallmarks of Successful Wellness Programs

The following factors have been shown to increase the success, adoption and ROI of workplace wellness programs.

- Employee Engagement<sup>5</sup>
  - Employees know about available wellness programs
  - Organizational culture supports wellness initiatives
  - Company models behaviors that program seeks to impart
  - Employees provided the time to participate in company-sponsored wellness programs
- Incentivize Participation<sup>6</sup>
  - Regular surveying of employees to address changing wants of incentives
  - Incentives awarded quickly and frequently
  - Incentives paid to charities and organizations
- Tailored Program<sup>7</sup>
  - Individually tailored physical activity programs result in a 35% increase in time invested in physical activity

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<sup>1</sup> [http://www.bc.edu/content/dam/files/research\\_sites/agingandwork/pdf/publications/FS38\\_HealthWellnessPrograms.pdf](http://www.bc.edu/content/dam/files/research_sites/agingandwork/pdf/publications/FS38_HealthWellnessPrograms.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> "Mindfulness from meditation associated with lower stress hormone" <https://www.ucdavis.edu/news/mindfulness-meditation-associated-lower-stress-hormone>

<sup>3</sup> "Meditation produces positive changes in the brain" <http://www.waisman.wisc.edu/news/davidson2.html>

<sup>4</sup> "Aetna Delivers Evidence-based Mind-Body Stress Management Programs" <https://www1.aetna.com/news/newsReleases/2012/0223-Aetna-Mind-Body.html>

<sup>5</sup> <http://www.gallup.com/businessjournal/168995/why-workplace-wellness-program-isn-working.aspx>

<sup>6</sup> <http://www.benefitspro.com/2015/10/07/8-wellness-engagement-tips?slreturn=1475007431>

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.transamericacenterforhealthstudies.org/docs/default-source/wellness-page/from-evidence-to-practice---workplace-wellness-that-works.pdf?sfvrsn=2>



- Measurement and Evaluation<sup>8</sup>
  - Measurement and evaluation plan in conjunction with program design
  - Integration of baseline data
  - Data collection, including questionnaires of current employee knowledge and health behaviors
  
- Manager Involvement & Wellness Champions<sup>9</sup>
  - Involvement of company executives demonstrates a serious commitment from the top. “If the CEO makes time for exercise, for instance, the employees will feel less self-conscious about taking a fitness break.”
  - Middle Managers can help to shape “minicultures” in the workplace and support employee’s wellness efforts.
  - Wellness Champions help by promoting events, encouraging, and mentoring.
  
- Alignment
  - Companies should promote their wellness program as part of their culture and maintain such programs as a priority – don’t allow priorities to shift.
  - Provide incentives, not punishments.
    - Reward for participation by providing incentives or discounts rather than punishing for non-participation by charging fees or threatening disciplinary action.
  
- Scope, Relevance, and Quality
  - Focus on wellness factors that aren’t exclusive to physical fitness, such as stress reduction and depression which are both major sources of lost productivity.
  - Providing a program that can be tailored and relevant to an employee can help boost their involvement, rather than providing a “cookie-cutter” option.
  - Make the program fun and/or competitive.
  
- Accessibility
  - Make services accessible by offering them onsite.
  - Make being healthy at work easier (provide healthy and convenient meal options in workplace vending machines and cafeterias)
  - Mobile/online access

## Optimizing Wellness Programs

An unmanaged wellness program will not perform as well as one that is measured and optimized. Key performance indicators to evaluate include attendance and popularity of classes and participation rates in response to internal marketing. Poor participation rates may mean that the class is not appropriately matched to the interest of employees, offered at a convenient time, taught by a competent teacher, or offered in an appropriate facility with access to changing rooms and

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<sup>8</sup> <https://www.transamericacenterforhealthstudies.org/docs/default-source/wellness-page/from-evidence-to-practice---workplace-wellness-that-works.pdf?sfvrsn=2>

<sup>9</sup> <https://hbr.org/2010/12/whats-the-hard-return-on-employee-wellness-programs>



proper equipment. It may also be indicative that employees lack of awareness of the classes and benefits available to them. For any on-site programming it is important to advertise it well in advance and communicate the information through multiple mediums, including signage, email, meeting invites, etc...

## The Cost of Wellness

In 2015, companies with a wellness program spent an average of \$683 per employee<sup>10</sup>. Companies like Welnys which offer per-service pricing rather than per-employee pricing, can make wellness much more affordable for an employer, starting at just \$499 per month irrespective of organization size. For companies who can't afford to subsidize wellness programs, employee co-pays are an option to defray costs. A survey of one of Welnys' clients found that 61.5% were willing to pay for wellness services at work themselves. For example, the average they were willing to pay for a 15 minute massage was \$18.87.

## The ROI of Wellness

The RAND Corporation found that for every dollar invested in enterprise wellness programs, the overall ROI is \$1.50.<sup>11</sup> According to Mike Tinney, CEO of Fitness Interactive Experience, corporate wellness ROI is difficult to measure. He says, "You can measure health improvement through biometric screening, you can measure engagement and retention. You can count calories and steps. But a hard ROI is challenging, because your biggest expense relating to health is insurance, and many external factors influence the cost of insurance coverage. If you're willing to buy into the notion that a healthier human being is more efficient, sick less often and happier, then investing in these programs for your employees (and yourself) makes a lot of sense."<sup>12</sup>

## The Benefits Companies Can Realize

Companies can recognize many benefits from investing in their employees through wellness programming. Studies have shown that it's possible to:

- Reduce health care costs
- Decrease attrition
- Positively impact recruiting
- Reduce instances of injury
- Reduce stress
- Increase focus and productivity

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<sup>10</sup> Online survey fielded from December 2014 through January 2015 among clients of National Business Group on Health and Fidelity Investments (NBGH). Metrics based on responses from 121 companies.

<sup>11</sup> <https://www.shrm.org/resourcesandtools/hr-topics/benefits/pages/real-roi-wellness.aspx>

<sup>12</sup> <http://www.cio.com/article/3016040/health/9-ways-corporate-fitness-and-wellness-programs-will-change-in-2016.html?page=2>



## Reducing Health Care Costs

- In a 2010 study in the health policy journal, “Health Affairs,” researchers found that medical costs fall by \$3.27 for every dollar spent on wellness programs and that absenteeism costs fall by about \$2.73 for every dollar spent.<sup>13</sup>

## Reducing Attrition/Retention

- Organizations with highly effective wellness programs report significantly lower voluntary attrition than do those whose programs have low effectiveness (9% vs. 15%).
- At the software firm SAS Institute, voluntary turnover is just 4%, thanks in part to their wellness program
- The Biltmore tourism enterprise reduced attrition to 9% in 2009, down from 19% in 2005. “Employees who participate in our wellness programs do not leave.”
- Nelnet asks departing employees in exit interviews what they will miss most. The number one answer: the wellness program.<sup>14</sup>

## Impact on Recruiting

- Nearly nine out of 10 employees say they consider wellness benefits when considering an employer.<sup>15</sup>
- A 2012 survey by health insurer Humana found that more than half of the small businesses employing more than 50 said health and wellness programs are critical for employee recruitment and retention.<sup>16</sup>

## Reducing Injury

- Green Mountain Coffee offers Mindful stretching in every factory it owns – and injuries are down all across the company<sup>17</sup>
- According to Occupational Health and Safety, implementing a workplace wellness program can help employers control worker's compensation claim costs by generating a reduction in return-to-work days, a reduction in frequency and severity of claims, and an increase in staff productivity. Wellness programs provide mechanisms that aid employees in adopting healthier lifestyles and help educate them on reducing or eliminating their risk factors.<sup>18</sup>
- The Minnesota Department of Transportation found that implementing a health and wellness program can produce 300 percent to 600 percent return on investment by reducing worker injuries and workers' compensation payments.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> <https://smallbusiness.yahoo.com/advisor/workplace-wellness-for-small-business-222142293.html>

<sup>14</sup> <https://hbr.org/2010/12/whats-the-hard-return-on-employee-wellness-programs>

<sup>15</sup> <https://whenwellnessworks.humana.com/workforce-priorities/why-wellness-programs-are-a-key-recruiting-tool-today/>

<sup>16</sup> <https://smallbusiness.yahoo.com/advisor/workplace-wellness-for-small-business-222142293.html>

<sup>17</sup> [https://books.google.com/books?id=rxC9BgAAQBAJ&pg=PA93&lpg=PA93&dq=stretching+green+mountain+coffee&source=bl&ots=jB9ISdGbGu&sig=C\\_eH4qocoBjqAQHWfihxz7iGdU&hl=en&sa=X&ved=0ahUKewj8lbO6ttbQAhUB2IMKHU86ABkQ6AEIQDAG#v=onepage&q=stretching%20green%20mountain%20coffee&f=false](https://books.google.com/books?id=rxC9BgAAQBAJ&pg=PA93&lpg=PA93&dq=stretching+green+mountain+coffee&source=bl&ots=jB9ISdGbGu&sig=C_eH4qocoBjqAQHWfihxz7iGdU&hl=en&sa=X&ved=0ahUKewj8lbO6ttbQAhUB2IMKHU86ABkQ6AEIQDAG#v=onepage&q=stretching%20green%20mountain%20coffee&f=false)

<sup>18</sup> <https://ohsonline.com/Articles/2013/04/01/Building-Wellness-Programs-with-Impact.aspx>

<sup>19</sup> <http://www.dot.state.mn.us/research/TS/2011/201107TS.pdf>



## Less Stress, More Focus

- An analysis of mindfulness research from Case Western Reserve University suggests that injecting a corporate culture of mindfulness not only improves focus, but the ability to manage stress and how employees work together.<sup>20</sup>
- Mindfulness from meditation is associated with lower stress hormone, suggests research from the Shamatha Project at the University of California, Davis.<sup>21</sup>

## Effect of Mindfulness on Leaders

- A 2016 multi-methods wait-list controlled study conducted with senior leaders who undertook an eight-week ‘Mindful Leader’ program concluded: "Our findings suggest that mindfulness practice should be considered an important and effective intervention in developing leadership capacity for the 21st century."<sup>22</sup>

## Companies Implementing Wellness

Some companies which are setting the bar for on-site wellness are Facebook with their Life@ program, Google, which is famed for their Search Inside Yourself mindfulness training, Salesforce, which offers on-Site nutrition and fitness programs and \$100/month reimbursement for wellness expenses, AOL, which boasts a national wellness program, Etsy, which has on site meditation room and General Mills<sup>23</sup> which was on the forefront of meditation at work. Aetna, however, embarked on what is probably the best studied and quantified wellness experience.

### Aetna: A Case Study

“We have seen first-hand how these mind-body programs have helped our employees deal with stress more effectively and help them achieve better overall health.”

-Elease Wright, head of Human Resources at Aetna.

Aetna tested a few hundred employees on several factors, including performing biometric tests. Then, employees were divided into three groups, a yoga group, a meditation group, and a control group. After several weeks, Aetna re-tested the employees and found the following changes:

	Yoga	Meditation	Control Group
Decrease in stress	36%	33%	18%
Improvement in heart rate measurements	Yes	Yes	No

<sup>20</sup> <https://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2016/03/160310141455.htm>

<sup>21</sup> <https://www.ucdavis.edu/news/mindfulness-meditation-associated-lower-stress-hormone>

<sup>22</sup> <http://ashridge.org.uk/Media-Library/Ashridge/PDFs/Publications/Ashridge-Mindful-Leader-for-web-low-res.pdf>

<sup>23</sup> <https://www.ft.com/content/d9cb7940-ebea-11e1-985a-00144feab49a>



Decrease in medical costs	-\$2000	-\$2000	None
Increase in productivity	\$3000/year	+63 mins/week	None

With the success of the pilot, the program was expanded to all Aetna employees. More than 13,000 employees have participated in one of these programs over the past three years.<sup>24</sup>

## Using Welnys

Welnys is a turn-key on-site wellness solution that optimizes ROI. We do this in two ways. First, we decrease the cost of implementing these programs through our marketplace of vetted and trusted practitioners. We work with 430 practitioners in 8 cities, who do everything from on-site yoga to nutrition. Secondly, our corporate platform, which was built-in house, markets these programs to employees and allows them to discover and book services, incentivizes them to participate, and provides analytic data to the employer. With these tools, employers can realize the best ROI on their wellness program. For more information, visit <http://www.welnys.com>

## Recommended Resources

- *Mindful Work*, David Gelles
- Mindfulnet.org <http://www.mindfulnet.org/>

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<sup>24</sup> <http://www.nytimes.com/2015/03/01/business/at-aetna-a-ceos-management-by-mantra.html>