

## **Reducing Stress in the Workplace**

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*In today's workplace, the reality of life is hitting hard. Fear about mergers, downsizing and new management have always induced a stressful environment. Adding to those pressures are new concerns involving terrorism, a slower economy, bankruptcy and fewer health and retirement benefits. The apprehension can be distressing and can cause physical and emotional illness, stress, depression, anxiety and quite possibly, suicide.*

*According to the Wellness Councils of America, "...in a recent nationwide poll, 78% of Americans describe their jobs as stressful. Moreover, the vast majority indicated that their stress levels have worsened over the past 10 years" ([www.welcoa.org](http://www.welcoa.org)). Employers that stand out during these times are those that recognize that workplace stress is inevitable and, subsequently, do something to help their employees.*

*Since the cost of extra benefits is often a deterrent to business owners, it makes sense to discuss what it could cost you if you do not have a wellness program at your company. It is a well-known fact that swelling health care costs in the United States are of major concern to employers, employees and health care providers. According to the Wellness Councils of America, "The United States spends more on health care than any other industrialized nation in the world and yet, in many respects, its citizens are not the healthiest...and in [one recent year], health care costs in the U.S. totaled in excess of \$1 trillion." Now, how does that affect you? "Of the \$585 billion that private payers expended for medical services in [one year], about 60% (\$348 billion) was spent by employers and employees... and between 1980 and 1993, spending by employers on health care as a percentage of total compensation to workers increased 3.7% to 6.6%." That's not good.*

*According to the Columbia Association, the average cost to employers in Columbia that have full wellness programs is only \$24,000 per company per year. A full wellness program is one that includes purchasing health club or gym memberships for some or all employees (most of these companies have more than 50 employees) and onsite exercise classes, onsite brown bag lunch seminars and even a scheduled company family day at the athletic facility. Imagine investing in the health of your employees, increasing morale in your company, reducing your health care costs, lowering absenteeism and reducing stress for less than \$500 per year per employee. (It's even less for smaller businesses.) Most companies give annual bonuses that far exceed that.*

*Here's a final statistic from the Wellness Councils of America about a top company in America whose executives decided to think about their human capital and invest in a wellness program. "Du Pont saw that each dollar invested in workplace health promotion yielded \$1.42 over two years in lower absenteeism costs at Du Pont Co. Absences from illness unrelated to the job among 45,000 workers dropped 14% at 41*

*industrial sites where the health promotion program was offered, compared with a 5.8% decline at 19 sites where it was not".*

*You, too, can make an investment in your employees and in your company. Start a wellness program today and reap the benefits of creating a less stressful workplace.*

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