

Wellbeing: Workplace workouts work

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Companies that promote and help with health, fitness and wellness programmes in the workplace are wise to do so, says Dr Trish Bradbury, senior lecturer in the School of Management at Massey University.

"If I was a company manager, I would definitely endorse a workplace wellbeing programme and see the benefits for the employees and the organisation, too," she says.

Bradbury says research shows that if employees are encouraged to live healthier lifestyles, this can help them be happier and they are likely to thank their company for these "benefits". They also appreciate "it shows a concern for them". Health initiatives can also:

- Increase productivity.
- Reduce absenteeism and injuries at work.
- Reduce staff turnover.
- Get the employee's family and community singing your praises.

Bradbury recommends companies offer health-style initiatives alongside education on what they are trying to achieve as this can have a better up-take on ideas.

Among the companies offering health initiatives are:

Chelsea Sugar employs a personal trainer at its refinery on the banks of Auckland's Waitemata Harbour to train 250 staff.

Fatso - which has New Zealand's biggest selection of DVDs and Blu-rays for rent - provides twice-weekly yoga for its Auckland staff. The boss also joins in for a stretch and work out.

Cigna Life Insurance NZ Ltd CEO Lance Walker plans to run Wellington's Cigna Round the Bays fun run and will also pay for his employees to participate. Cigna subsidises up to 50 per cent off gym memberships, offers fruit in the office and subsidises eye exams and flu jabs.

Flu vaccinations are also free at ASB. Graeme Edwards, ASB General Counsel and Company Secretary, believes that a healthy workforce makes for a "healthy business". Staff enjoy participating in their wellbeing challenges and for many it boosts "camaraderie and a bit of motivation to get the ball rolling for healthier or more active lifestyles".

In one initiative, almost 900 staff participated in a four-week walking programme where employees wore pedometers to count steps. Another initiative, "Sugar Crash", encouraged reducing sugar intake. Participants shared a total waist measurement loss of 310cm. The average loss per person was 2cm.

The bank also provides fresh fruit and life insurance assistance for permanent staff. It also has lock-up facilities for bikes, showers, lockers and changing room facilities to support cycling to work at ASB North Wharf.

Southern Cross Health Society started with weight-loss and smoking cessation programmes and has moved on to nutrition, meditation and injecting new life into group after-work activities incorporating fun runs, yoga and even hip-hop classes, says Vicki Caisley, head of people and talent.

In February, the company offered a nurse to check blood pressure, cholesterol, blood sugars, BMI, height and weight statistics. Following this, 210 staff participated in either walking groups or entered events.

In May, more than 33 staff did a 10-week biggest loser competition. Project manager Jacinta Matisi won this by joining a work walk group, doing strength exercises and eating healthier, which resulted in a body fat loss of more than 20 per cent.

She's now helping other staff, friends and family to make life changes.