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## Let's get physical

Office workout programs have multiple benefits

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### Getting the most out of wellness

Welcome to Atlanta Business Chronicle's annual Corporate Health and Wellness Guide.

Inside these four pages we offer simple tips and useful information to help companies and employees assess and improve their health and well-being.

Included is an article on how several companies in metro Atlanta help their employees get more exercise. You'll find some tips you might try at your office or place of employment. Another article discusses the issue of substance abuse at the workplace.

To produce this publication, we gathered tips and statistics from the Arthritis Foundation, the Diabetes Association of Atlanta, Kaiser Permanente of Georgia, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Piedmont Healthcare, Northside Hospital System, Gwinnett Medical Center, Atlanta Medical Center, Grady Health System and others. Contributing Writer Tonya Layman compiled the tips found in the section.

— *Lisa R. Schoolcraft, Industry Focus Editor*

Some studies have reported that “sitting is the new smoking” indicating the more time people spend sitting, the more likely they are to develop serious medical conditions. Developing an exercise program for your workers can not only benefit their health but can help boost the company’s bottom line through increased productivity, higher morale, lower turnover and cheaper insurance premiums resulting from fewer claims.

Dr. Keith Kantor, CEO and founder of the Atlanta-based Named Program LLC, believes encouraging employees to work out is the right thing to do.

“Being overweight is expensive to employees, employers and the national health-care system. Obesity and diabetes are the two biggest cash strains on our health-care system right now where you can have an immediate effect,” he said.

Companies can certainly lead the charge for change by creating fun programs that engage employees toward healthier living, he added.

Rather than just putting a program in place and telling employees to do it, Kantor recommends following these tips. First, ask for input from the employees and make the program easy to do. He also suggests bringing in professionals who can address fitness and nutritional for lunch and learns. Another great perk is to give those employees who chose to work out during lunch permission to eat their lunch at their desk while they work.

“Also if you have vending machines in the office revamp with healthier choices,” he said. “Keep fruit in the break room and instead of having a birthday cake when celebrating someone’s birthday, have a healthy food arrangement.”

Kantor said technology tools can help nudge a person to get moving. He uses UtiliFIT, an app that is a daily fitness activity game that addresses the health concerns associated with sitting for hours. It sends reminders to the user throughout the day to get up and active with an activity that takes 30 to 60 seconds to complete. People can participate individually or with a team.

“An employer should encourage these activities for several reasons,” he said. “It is good for their employees. It makes them happier and healthier.”

It is also good for the employer, Kantor said, “because it lowers insurance costs and increases productivity and morale. It is the right and smart thing to do, but the employer has to be the driving force.”

That means there needs to be buy in from the top level leaders, he added.

At eVestment, Nanci Lamborn, head of human resources, doesn't have to encourage the top leaders to “buy in” to the program. They created it. Their program started as a competition among the company leadership to get healthier in 2012. They were so pleased with the results they decided to roll it out to the entire company.

The company now sponsors twice-a-year, 90-day fitness challenges where participants who experience the best overall improvement are given fitness-related prizes, including the coveted boxing belt — a rotating trophy of sorts.

“Bragging rights are just as important as the incentive itself. We really celebrate the winners and that has as much impact as the tangible incentive. Plus, there is always that intrinsic incentive knowing you just lost 10 pounds or you just became a runner and that you changed your lifestyle,” Lamborn said.

In their most recent challenge, 115 employees globally participated. The average weight loss was seven and a half pounds per person.

“The focus isn't about who weighs less and or who can lift the most weight. It is simply about pushing yourself to be a little bit better,” Lamborn said. “We have seen a correlation between happier and better performing individuals when there is some sort of fitness involved.”

While it is hard to measure the specific return on investment, eVestment has experienced increased camaraderie and team building and believes its healthier population has resulted in lower insurance claims dollars. The

company had a significantly lower health-care cost increase this year versus other companies. Lamborn said while most other companies had double digit increases, eVestment experienced an 8 percent jump.

Even its health insurance broker and carrier have helped by providing some wellness dollars to subsidize program costs.

Additionally, eVestment offers a gym membership reimbursement program which typically covers 100 percent of gym membership costs. About 65 percent of its employees take advantage of this benefit. And next year, when the company moves into its new digs, it will offer an onsite gym.

Dr. Angelina Cain, WellStar's medical director of obesity medicine and HealthStart, WellStar's corporate wellness program, advises companies wanting to start an exercise or wellness program to reach out to the local health professionals for guidance.

"It is important to talk to a professional to have that medical insight," she said. "So much around wellness and weight loss is not coming from trained license specialists and it muddies the water. These programs tend to be more successful when they are linked in to the medical community."

WellStar can provide speakers who address exercise, diet and nutrition and how these things can impact health to office populations. It can also set up corporate memberships at its gym, Health Place.

Most important, she added, is that companies want to promote programs that result in consistent, long-term change, not just a challenge that encourages someone to drop weight or make short-term exercise goals.

"A bad program may actually create bad behaviors," she said. "You are looking for long-term behavior change. If you can have a sustained 5 to 10 pound weight loss you reduce your risks for a cardiovascular event and that will result in happy, healthier employees."

## **CLOSER LOOK**

## **When creating an exercise program:**

Ask employees for input

Make it fun – sponsor a contest, assign mentors and communicate results

Allow time to workout

Celebrate those who make improvements