



**EEO TRUST**  
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- 02 Organised wellness
- 05 Getting out into the great outdoors – Auckland Regional Council
- 06 Energetic staff – the Solid Energy way
- 06 Latest research
- 06 Please read on...

# Organised wellness

Valuing employees, looking after their health, and ensuring they are able to perform at optimal levels are some of the steps employers can take to improve staff morale and enhance corporate image.

Wellness initiatives can help manage workplace stress (whether the stress is related to work or not), prevent illness, reduce absenteeism, and increase staff loyalty. A recent American survey found that 60% of employees considered wellness programmes an incentive to remain with their current employer.<sup>1</sup>

However, helping staff stay well at work is only one side of the equation. The other side includes flexible working options and work-life balance initiatives which give people the flexibility to take part in personal pursuits or sport so that they can de-stress and recharge.

## Costs of absenteeism

Apart from the promised return on human investment, employers could ask: "What [does] it cost NOT to keep employees well in the first place?"<sup>2</sup>

In New Zealand, injury, illness and absenteeism cost business big money - more than half of the annual corporate spend of \$1.7 billion on health care relates to absences from work. This amounts to approximately \$940 million, with a further \$395 million spent on ACC, \$240 million on private health care schemes, and \$140 million on other health care measures.<sup>3</sup>

Of course there are other reasons why people are absent from work besides injury or illness; problems at home, bullying at work, the need to care for a sick family member, mental fatigue, or burnout to name a few. Loss of work

time due to health reasons can also put a strain on remaining staff or resources, often creating heavier workloads, emotional strain, delays and disruptions, as well as the loss of corporate knowledge and continuity.

According to the Wellness Councils of America<sup>4</sup> (WELCOA), there are varying degrees of absenteeism:

- **Level 1: Lost from the workforce**  
This is where a staff member has died, retired or left the position permanently.
- **Level 2: Not at work (Paid absence)**  
The employee's contribution is lost while they are absent, or the company pays the absentee and another person in order to get the work done.
- **Level 3: Not doing work in work time**  
An employee is at work but may be doing unrelated tasks. They may be distracted or take longer breaks due to illness or other reasons.
- **Level 4: Not doing well while working**  
This level describes how well the work is done, the quality of the work and value of productivity. Employees may make mistakes or produce lower quality work because they are not feeling well. Some employers find it easy to calculate sick days but "presenteeism", where employees are present at work but not producing quality work, can be a grey area. This is particularly relevant to industries where productivity or output is hard to monitor or measure. The WELCOA report suggests practical ways to assess productivity using a personal and

qualitative approach. One such example is using a question such as:

"So, David, on a scale of 1 to 100, compared to your best day, how well did you perform today?" This kind of scale asks employees to quantify how much of their normal effort they were able to give on any particular day—whether they were feeling sick or not.<sup>5</sup>

## Does wellness affect productivity?

In the 90's, healthcare schemes mainly assisted with medical bills, and focussed on treating illnesses and rehabilitation. Nowadays, it is more about preventing these occurrences and extending periods of physical and mental wellness. Considering New Zealand's skill shortage, ageing population, and emigration statistics, it seems sensible to keep the present workforce as healthy as possible for as long as possible.

World health trends are reflected in New Zealand's state of health. The prevalence of obesity in New Zealand rose from 17% in 1997 to 21% in 2003, and this is compared to an OECD median of 13%.<sup>6</sup> The World Health Organisation predicts that by 2020, depression will be the second leading cause of health impairment worldwide<sup>7</sup>, and the general working population is also ageing.

A recent Australian survey found that employees with "poor" health had up to nine times the annual sick days of workers with "good health". "Healthier"

1 American Association of Occupational Health Nurses Inc, 2003. cited in "Health and Wellness" at [www.bsr.org/CSRResources/IssueBriefDetail.cfm?DocumentID=50304](http://www.bsr.org/CSRResources/IssueBriefDetail.cfm?DocumentID=50304)

2 David Hunnicutt. (ed) 2003. "The Path To Productivity: A Measurable Connection Between Health and Work Performance." *Absolute Advantage*, Vol 2 (8), p.6. [www.welcoa.org/freeresources/index.php?category=8](http://www.welcoa.org/freeresources/index.php?category=8)

3 Conversa Global. 2005. *Southern Cross Healthcare Research Findings on the Corporate Market*.

4 David Hunnicutt. (ed) 2003. "The Path To Productivity: A Measurable Connection Between Health and Work Performance." *Absolute Advantage*, Vol 2 (8), pp.11-12. [www.welcoa.org/freeresources/index.php?category=8](http://www.welcoa.org/freeresources/index.php?category=8)

5 Ibid. Page 43

6 Ministry of Social Development. 2005. *The social report 2005*. [www.socialreport.msd.govt.nz/health/obesity.html](http://www.socialreport.msd.govt.nz/health/obesity.html)

7 Psychdirect. 2006. *Mental health problems affect 1 in 4 people*. [www.psychdirect.com/](http://www.psychdirect.com/)

employees were nearly three times more productive at work than the least healthy ones. This equated to 140 working hours per month compared with 45 working hours.<sup>8</sup>

Many people are working long hours every week, eat between one and two meals on site a day, and in many cases spend more waking hours with colleagues than with partners. Employers can offer a supportive, healthy environment for employees and this holistic approach can, in turn, influence both working relationships and relationships outside the workplace.

## Making a difference

Vast amounts of time and money are not necessary to set up effective wellness initiatives. Making small changes can create a shift; even investing in a simple water cooler system can pay off huge dividends. As little as a 2-3% reduction in body water can result in up to a 20% reduction in productivity or work capacity, and can contribute to irritability, poor decision making, and injuries.<sup>9</sup>

A study conducted by Motorola over a three-year period indicated that for every US\$1 the company spent on wellness benefits, it saved US\$3.93. The company estimated that in 2000, "its Wellness Initiatives saved the company US\$6.5 million in avoided healthcare costs and US\$10.5 million in avoided disability payments."<sup>10</sup>

Encouraging an active lifestyle amongst employees can have long-term impacts on wellbeing. As little as 30 minutes of moderate exercise a day can achieve health benefits according to the Push-Play campaign. These can include weight loss, reduced cholesterol, blood pressure, or chance of heart attack, and it can lower the risk of developing diabetes or cancer.

## Endorphin employees

Stress is prevalent in today's fast-paced work culture with mobiles and

blackberries tracking us down 24/7. Unaddressed stress can lead to errors at work, injury, fatigue, illness and disease. According to Medibank Private, 53% of Australian workers interviewed reported "feeling overwhelmed with pressure and stress a significant amount of the time."<sup>11</sup>

In New Zealand, creating a safe working environment is a legal consideration. Last year, Nalder and Biddle was the first company in New Zealand convicted for failing to take reasonable steps to reduce stress in the workplace after an employee broke down from work-related stress.<sup>12</sup>

Fitter people seem to be less stressed and are also able to deal with stress more effectively. One UK study of 293 people who were members and non-members of a corporate health and fitness club found that the club members had "better psychological mood states and physical wellbeing than non-members / were more satisfied with their jobs and demonstrated fewer days absent from work than non-members."<sup>13</sup>

## Emotional wellness

Employee Assistance Programmes (EAP) are professional counselling services offered to employees and/or their families to deal with work or personal issues. These programmes have become very popular in the last decade and whether employers offer an in-house or contracted service, it is important to ensure that employees' confidentiality is guaranteed.

Providing educational seminars can effectively address issues affecting employees or open up the debate around the subject, but staff should not feel targeted or pressured into attending these sessions. Some examples of behavioural change programmes employers can offer are: domestic violence seminars, anger management counselling, alcohol or drug cessation meetings, mental wellness talks, financial planning, nutritional advice and smokefree incentives.

## Changing workplace culture and habits

As with other workplace initiatives, buy-in from senior management, unions and staff is critical to effectively implementing a workplace wellness programme.

- Decide what areas to focus on such as fitness, sport events, subsidies, health checks, screenings, preventative training, and/or seminars and see how these can link in with each other.
- Assess current absenteeism, turnover, and injury figures.
- Conduct a climate survey of employees' attitudes to work. This will also create a benchmark for the programme, gauge staff needs, preferences and current physical activities or areas of concern. Many employees may already have their own training schedules and the workplace programme can enhance these activities.
- Set-up a team or co-ordinator who will be responsible for the roll-out of the programme.
- Contract a reputable company or trainer to assess the current wellness of the workforce.
- Most importantly communicate the programme's aims and options to staff. Notice boards, intranet, induction programmes and annual reviews are good ways to spread the word.
- Monitor up-take by staff and management and assess absenteeism and injury figures again after six or 12 months.
- Change and modify the programme accordingly.

8 Medibank Private. 2005. *Healthy employees are three times more productive.* [www.medibank.com.au/aboutus/pressreleases\\_display.asp?id=218](http://www.medibank.com.au/aboutus/pressreleases_display.asp?id=218)

9 Tracey Paterson. 1997. *Effect of fluid intake on the physical and mental performance of forest workers.* LIRO.

10 [www.bsr.org/CSRResources/IssueBriefDetail.cfm?DocumentID=50304](http://www.bsr.org/CSRResources/IssueBriefDetail.cfm?DocumentID=50304)

11 Medibank Private. 2005. *Healthy employees are three times more productive.* [www.medibank.com.au/aboutus/pressreleases\\_display.asp?id=218](http://www.medibank.com.au/aboutus/pressreleases_display.asp?id=218)

12 *Brookers Legal News.* 14 April 2005.

13 AJ Daley, G Parfitt, "Good health - is it worth it?" *Journal of Occupational & Organizational Psychology*, 1996, Vol 69 (2), pp 121-134.

## On your marks...

**Not all initiatives have to cost a lot. Small, simple changes can still create behavioural shifts. Here are a few examples:**

- Ensure staff workstations are set up in line with OSH and OOS recommendations.
- Offer healthy food options in the lunchroom or at morning teas.
- Get rid of the high-sugar stock in vending machines or ask for healthier options.
- Set up bicycle racks, clean out change rooms and create walking/cycling groups.
- Sign-post the stairwell to encourage staff to avoid the lift.
- Sign up for the Cancer Society's free LiveSmart e-newsletter at [www.livesmart.org.nz](http://www.livesmart.org.nz).
- Allocate meditation, spiritual or relaxation sessions. See [www.absolutelynothing.co.nz](http://www.absolutelynothing.co.nz) for other ideas.
- Encourage teams to take part in Round the Bays, Relay for Life, marathons or other community events. See [www.sparc.org.nz](http://www.sparc.org.nz) for a list of regional sports trusts and events in your area. On their Active Workplaces section there is a checklist on how to become a cycling-friendly workplace.
- Have an outdoors family/social day away from the office/site with a few physical activities planned. These can range from flying kites to touch rugby, and should be inclusive so all employees can take part.
- Schedule an "alternative transport to work" day.
- Create a "sugar-free" or "no fizzy drinks" day in the office.
- Support bike wise week and the business battle. See [www.bikewise.co.nz/Site/businessbattle/](http://www.bikewise.co.nz/Site/businessbattle/)
- Don't contact staff after working hours and ensure people don't work long hours. If they are, consider whether their workload is too heavy or if they need extra training.

## Get set...

**Employers can consider varying levels of wellness investments:**

- Install a water-filter system and remind staff to keep hydrated.
- Buy fruit once a week for a communal snack bowl.
- Purchase pedometers for staff and set up a 10,000 step per day record sheet.
- Contract an OSH nurse to conduct full medical examinations such as hearing, eyesight, blood and cholesterol tests.
- Contract a personal trainer or 10,000 step company to set-up and monitor the staff exercise programme.
- Consider implementing a workplace literacy programme; literacy levels influence incidence/accident levels.
- Offer paid wellness days.
- Set up corporate sports teams such as indoor netball, soccer, cricket, touch rugby or sponsor membership rates at the local gym.
- Provide monthly or weekly massage, shiatsu, physiotherapy.
- Provide a grant for sports equipment, footwear, gym memberships, team fees; some companies allocate \$200 per employee paid on production of a relevant receipt.
- Approach Weight Watchers to set up meetings on site.
- Offer cessation programmes or treatment for smoking, alcohol, drugs.
- Contract a nutritionist to create healthy eating plans for staff and/or the cafeteria.
- Hold seminars on nutrition, stress, or other wellness issues that come up in your climate survey. Refer to [Synergy Health](http://Synergy Health) or [The Body Corporate](http://The Body Corporate).
- Working Well, the workplace mental health division of the Mental Health Foundation, offers training and seminars on anxiety, depression and issues affecting mental wellness. See [www.mentalhealth.org.nz](http://www.mentalhealth.org.nz) or contact them on 0800 496 754.
- If you are in the Auckland area and are in the manufacturing/factory work industry, contact Heartbeat Challenge. This programme, developed by the National Heart Foundation and Auckland Regional Public Health Service, encourages workplaces to create supportive healthy environments and concentrates on three main areas: nutrition, physical activity, and smokefree environments. A workplace is assessed, staff surveyed, and a plan developed to incorporate 15 new initiatives, five in each health area. Contact Jenny Bratty on 09 261 1620 for details. Certain criteria apply.
- Participate in "FeetBeat" a team walking event held annually. Teams of up to eight participants walk across a "virtual" route over eight weeks. See [www.arphs.govt.nz/Projects/HeartBeat\\_Challenge/FeetBeat/Feetbeat.asp](http://www.arphs.govt.nz/Projects/HeartBeat_Challenge/FeetBeat/Feetbeat.asp)
- Offer full medical coverage through an established medical health insurer such as [Southern Cross Healthcare](http://Southern Cross Healthcare).
- Arrange mole mapping checks.
- Contribute to employees' Aactiva accounts, which can be used for medical supplies and services [www.activa.co.nz](http://www.activa.co.nz).
- Set up a corporate gym on your premises for staff.

# Getting out into the great outdoors - Auckland Regional Council

You'd think being outdoors in thousands of acres of prime Auckland bush would be enough to ensure a healthy workforce, but the Auckland Regional Council (ARC) and its subsidiary, Auckland Regional Transport Authority (ARTA), go far beyond availing staff of fresh air and scenic vistas. The organisation takes wellness seriously and knows that investing in staff health pays off.

Every Monday sees a registered nurse, Tim Norman of Life Care Consultants Ltd, in the ARC's head office where employees can take advantage of the free half-hour wellness checks. Although they are not obliged to do so, 180 ARC field and office staff have already taken up the health checks.

Tim assesses blood pressure, hearing, cholesterol and sugar levels, as well as body mass index measurements. He also visits field staff in Parks, Marine Operations, Botanic Gardens and Call Centre divisions. Key issues from his assessments are then highlighted in related wellness seminars offered to staff. For example, a flu pandemic seminar is scheduled for April of this year and will be followed by the annual free flu vaccination programme for all staff, and in May, a series will focus on injury prevention, conserving hearing and giving up smoking.

The OSH nurse currently presents OOS seminars and is available to set up posture-friendly workstations for individual staff members, gives medical advice, and refers staff for further tests when necessary. The ARC also offers Employee Assistance Programme (EAP) services and subsidises three of these professional counselling sessions per staff member.

Paul Chambers, ARC's and ARTA's Health and Safety Advisor, believes that preventative measures can save lives. "We introduced mole mapping as part of our health and wellness initiatives, and some staff members were diagnosed with moles that needed to be removed." Field staff spend so much time in the sun they have high priority in the queue for the mole mapping examination. Staff are given follow up examinations every one to

two years. Paul adds that it is important for employees to follow up with the GP/nurse immediately should something present itself between scheduled mole mapping visits. "This is not something that can be put off, we know that melanoma is an aggressive disease and people need to take immediate action. It is our main concern that employees remain healthy."

The ARC has a social club employee wellness fund that subsidises employee initiated wellness programmes. Funding (\$500 for a six-month period) is usually allocated to proposed group or team programmes, and the programme must be available to all ARC staff.



ARC dragon boating team

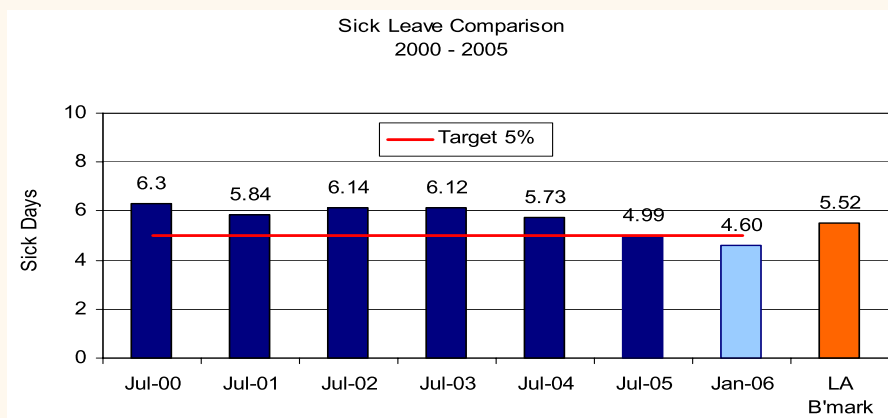
Encouraging sport and fitness initiatives seems to be working for the ARC. "From a total of 550 employees we have over 70 employees who have joined the YMCA taking advantage of our discounted rate, and last year we had three netball, three basketball, and four volleyball teams, yoga sessions on a Friday, indoor soccer and a dragon boating team," says Paul. Employees are encouraged to use the ACC warm-up techniques prior to, and after, exercising as part of injury prevention.

About 30 ARC members play rugby

union and league, and 18 play touch. "In a recent touch tournament there were 10 ARC teams competing, which was great to see. Health and wellness is not just about raising awareness, it is also about having fun and interacting in a healthy way," he adds.

There has been a reduction in the amount of time off; sick leave and absenteeism is down to 4.6 days per employee per year. This is the lowest in five years of comparative figures. In July 2000 sick days averaged 6.3 and in July 2005 this figure had dropped to 4.99, a significant change.

The next project is to survey staff on their current and preferred modes of travel and develop initiatives from the results. The aim is to develop sustainable transport options and maximise transport choices for staff travelling to and from work. Forty per cent of congestion on Auckland roads is education-related, and most travel is done within half a kilometre of the school zone. ARTA, a subsidiary of ARC, aims to offer employees bus passes for work-related journeys, and ARC hopes to improve the bicycle racks and change rooms available to staff. "We are constantly looking at new ways to promote healthier ways of getting to and from work" says Paul. "More sustainable means of transport like cycling, walking or car pooling should be encouraged to create a modal shift away from the single occupancy car journey to work," concludes Paul. "We are confident this will have a positive impact on staff wellness and improve focus in the workplace."



# Energetic staff – the Solid Energy way

Last May, Solid Energy's Christchurch office initiated a 12-week "Healthy Living Lifestyle Challenge" as part of its commitment to health and wellness in the organisation. The Challenge was designed to improve staff awareness of general health and wellbeing issues, and improve staff fitness.

Participants volunteered to undertake glucose and cholesterol tests, as well as a fitness assessment with a personal trainer who weighed and measured them. Throughout the Challenge participants were encouraged to take part in the various activities including seminars on nutrition, fitness and stress management, as well as talks on alcohol and drugs. This educational angle was combined with physical activities such as walking, aquacise, running, mountain biking, and a "boot camp" at a local gym. Of the 80 staff, there was a 70% up-take and employees are still going strong.

Mel Janssen, the Christchurch office accounts clerk who won the Challenge and received a weekend trip away for two to Hanmer Springs, has kept up her active lifestyle. "I recently took part in the She Triathlon with a few other women from work, which was fun. I still do aquacise, which I had never tried before the Challenge, and we still walk 30 minutes a day during lunchtime. It's great because it's active and social and gets my mind off the monthly accounts," says Mel.

Each participant on the Healthy Living Lifestyle Challenge gained one point for attending an event, and these were then added to points earned from positive physical changes in fitness, weight and measurements.

"What I liked best about the Challenge was that it gave me a goal to work towards and motivated me to increase my exercise and weight loss. All up I lost about 5kg but more importantly I lost

inches and my aerobic fitness improved," says Mel. "We all definitely feel healthier and it's good to know the company cares about how we feel and values our health," she adds.

Approximately 45 Solid Energy staff members took part in this year's Buller Marathon either in the relay team category, full or half-marathon run or half-marathon walk. Entry fees and T-shirts were paid for by Solid Energy and it also provided accommodation for staff travelling from Christchurch. After the race, the company paid for a big celebration meal for the team.

There is no formal running programme but groups do train together, and often enter other races, marathons and triathlons. This year may see the establishment of a more formal training programme, and another Challenge is on the cards.

For examples of other organisations leading the way in health and wellness initiatives, such as Vector's VectorLife programme, visit our [website](#) or purchase a copy of [A Question of Balance](#).

## Latest research

### Flexible working

The Trades Union Congress in the UK has released a report assessing flexibility in the workplace and employees' attitudes towards it. It found that union members are more likely to enjoy the benefits of flexible working options. However, the percentage of employees who are able to take up flexitime options is only 11.5%, lower than the levels in 1995 (14.9%). More than one in ten employees said they would "prefer to work fewer hours even if this involved a drop in pay but they are not able to do so." The research also indicated that more than "800,000 part-time workers would prefer to work more hours but are trapped in low hours jobs" often for low pay.

*Challenging times: flexibility and flexible working in the UK.* See [www.tuc.org.uk/work\\_life/tuc-11171-f0.cfm](http://www.tuc.org.uk/work_life/tuc-11171-f0.cfm)

## Please read on...

### Working families

*Unfinished work: building equality and democracy in an era of working families*, edited by Jody Heymann and Christopher Beem, comments on the challenges that working families face today. This collection of articles includes views on historical changes, gender and class inequalities, challenges and solutions. Authors discuss how low and high income families face different challenges, the role corporates play in the working-family dilemma, how other nations have addressed equity issues, and why American workers with family responsibilities are struggling. The last chapter suggests policy solutions that would eliminate inequalities across gender and class with regards to work and caregiving in the US. Published by The New Press, 2005, ISBN: 1-56584-922-1.

### Stress beaters

*Beating stress at work: a Safeguard survival guide*, by David Brown, explores the causes of stress in the workplace, affects of depression, and how employees can reduce attention fatigue. Simple suggestions on how employees can be happy at work include naming one's feelings, focussing on the current situation, and creating boundaries or priorities. Time management strategies and a shortcuts section offer guidelines on reasonable deadlines and realistic task expectations. Published by Brookers Ltd, 2004, ISBN: 0-86472-481-0.

Members of the EEO Employers Group can borrow these books from the [EEO Library](#).

To join the library, email [Renee Schick](mailto:Renee.Schick).