

Subsidising gym memberships makes perfect cents!

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Successful organisations seek every opportunity to positively influence productivity and there has never been a more fortuitous time to start thinking outside the usual scope. It is widely acknowledged in many circles that healthy employees are both happy and more productive. So naturally we now turn to employee health when it comes to productivity.

Let's focus on one of the key modifiable indicators of individual health - physical activity. Historically speaking there was no need to routinely exercise as the rigours of day-to-day living provided more than enough opportunities to burn energy and maintain a healthy body weight¹. Recent findings suggest that for those working in sedentary jobs (seated for more than 4-5 hours per day) or for those currently overweight, 60 minutes of physical activity may be required to maintain a healthy body weight².

Previous thinking was that this was the sole responsibility of the employee. Now business can see it as more than just a social obligation, there can actually be a win for both parties. Indeed earlier this year the World Economic Forum conservatively estimated that improving the wellness of the workforce could yield an annual return of three to one³.

To encourage your workforce to be more physically active you need to assist them to break down their perceived barriers to participation⁴. For many people, the

biggest barrier is access to affordable facilities such as gyms. Therefore a proactive solution is to subsidise memberships to quality facilities that meet standards.

This sends a direct message of support to your workforce and subsequently employees are more likely to start and maintain regular exercise. In terms of productivity there are many benefits to gain including increased moral, job satisfaction, ability to cope with stress, combined with the potential for less absenteeism, turnover, and injuries. It's a concept that makes perfect cents!

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1. Egger, G. J., Vogels, N., & Westerterp, K. R. (2001). Estimating

historical changes in physical activity levels. *Medical Journal of Australia*, 175, 635-636.

2. Brown, W., Ball, K., Bauman, A., Salmon, J., Bellrow, B., Olsen, B., Shilton, T., & Cooper, C. (2007). Physical activity and energy balance. Prepared for the National Physical Activity Committee, National Heart Foundation of Australia.

3. World Economic Forum (2007). Working toward wellness: accelerating the prevention of chronic disease. Prepared in cooperation with PricewaterhouseCoopers.

4. Sallis, J. L., & Owen, N. (1999). Physical activity and behavioural medicine. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

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