



EMPLOYERS

# WORKPLACE WELLNESS



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**RUDD CENTER**  
FOR FOOD POLICY & OBESITY

Companies can benefit from implementing workplace wellness initiatives, as they often result in healthier employees leading to a reduction in health care costs, decreases in absenteeism, and improvements in employee productivity.<sup>1</sup> However, some companies may wonder, should weight loss be a goal of workplace wellness initiatives?

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## Weight loss should not be a goal of workplace wellness initiatives

Monitoring and rewarding employees for pounds lost might seem like a straightforward or appropriate component of a workplace wellness program. However, there are several reasons why this practice is not recommended:

- **Most people do not maintain substantial weight loss.** Although it is possible for some people to maintain substantial weight loss over time, for most people this does not happen. Instead, most people who experience significant weight loss tend to regain it within 1-5 years.<sup>2</sup>
- **Body weight does not always equate to health.** Individuals with a BMI in the 'normal' range can have high-risk conditions (e.g., high blood pressure or cholesterol), while individuals with high body weight can have healthy nutritional and behavioral habits. Evidence suggests that wellness programs are more effective at reducing elevated biomarkers of health like blood pressure, glucose, and cholesterol than they are at creating lasting weight loss.<sup>3</sup> Furthermore, employee wellness programs that promote health without focusing on weight are appropriate for employees of all shapes, sizes, and health statuses.

- Emphasizing body weight may stigmatize employees. It is common for employees of higher body weight to experience weight-based stigma and mistreatment in the workplace. Workplace initiatives that focus on body weight may contribute to a stigmatizing weight culture and/or make employees feel stigmatized.<sup>4</sup> To ensure that all employees feel comfortable, it is best not to include weight loss as part of a workplace wellness initiative.
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## Suggestions for effective, non-stigmatizing wellness initiatives:

- Reward employees for health behaviors (e.g., participating in exercise, getting regular health screenings), rather than weight loss
- Include nutritious food options when providing food at workplace meetings or work-related social events
- Make stairways a safe and attractive alternative to the elevator
- Ensure that healthy options are available in workplace cafeterias and vending machines
- Host a health fair where employees can conveniently participate in health screenings
- Include supervisors and employees in deciding on what initiatives they would like to implement

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