



FRUITS AND VEGETABLES AND PHYSICAL ACTIVITY AT THE WORKSITE:

Business Leaders and Working Women Speak Out on Access and Environment

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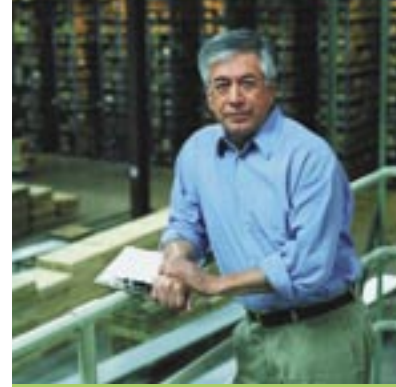
BACKGROUND

California is renowned for its abundant opportunities to enjoy fresh, nutritious foods and physical activity. Contrary to its healthy reputation, the state has had one of the fastest rates of increase in obesity among working-age adults in the nation.¹ Surgeon General Richard Carmona stated that obesity is the fastest growing cause of illness and death in America today.² Well over half of California's adults are overweight or obese.³ Inactivity, overweight, and obesity cost the state an estimated \$24.6 billion a year in direct medical, lost productivity, and workers' compensation costs.⁴

More than 75 percent of medical care costs are attributable to chronic diseases, which in large part are preventable.⁵ To reduce this percentage, improve overall health, and achieve appropriate weight, Californians should eat a healthy diet that is rich in fruits and vegetables and engage in physical activity every day. While this sounds like a simple solution, the truth is that Californians are not eating enough of the healthiest foods and getting enough regular physical activity. According to the 2001 California Dietary Practices Survey, California adults consume an average of only 3.9 daily servings of fruits and vegetables, which is well below the 5 to 9 daily servings recommended for good health.⁶ This survey also showed that one of the most common reasons Californians gave for not eating fruits and vegetables was that they were "hard to get at work." This barrier was cited by 61 percent of the respondents⁶. In addition,

only 36 percent of California adults engage in 30 minutes of moderate-intensity physical activity five days a week.⁷

Improving dietary practices and physical activity are major strategies for preventing many of the most common chronic diseases, such as heart disease, cancer, and diabetes.⁸ An important way to advance the health of Californians is to develop programs and policies at worksites that support fruit and vegetable consumption and daily physical activity. Worksites are a viable place to promote these healthy behaviors because over 70 percent of working-age Californians are employed.⁹ A special emphasis on reaching certain ethnic groups, such as African Americans and Latinos, and low-income employees is necessary since health risks are disproportionately high among these audiences and worksite wellness programs often focus on higher wage earners.¹⁰ Women should also be the focus of worksite programs that promote good nutrition and physical activity because they will most likely help their children, partners, and other family members adopt healthier lifestyles.



Inactivity, overweight, and obesity cost California an estimated \$24.6 billion a year in direct medical, lost productivity, and workers' compensation costs.



METHODS

... research was initiated to determine the best ways to increase fruit and vegetable consumption and physical activity in the workplace.

From August through October 2002, the *California 5 a Day Worksite Program* conducted telephone interviews and focus groups with California business leaders from small-, medium-, and large-sized companies. Focus groups with low- and middle-income working women throughout the state were also held. This research was initiated to determine the best ways to increase fruit and vegetable consumption and physical activity in the workplace.

Interviews and Focus Groups with Business Leaders

Telephone interviews were conducted with a sample of 40 business leaders who were selected at random from a comprehensive database of public and private companies in California. The business leaders were chief executive officers, directors of benefits administration, human resource managers, controllers, and chief financial officers. They were employed in a variety of businesses, including service, manufacturing, wholesale/retail, agriculture, construction, transportation, insurance, communications, and utility. Over 40 percent of the employees who worked with the leaders were blue-collar workers. The interviews were conducted to:

- Identify the type of unhealthy behaviors that affect employees;
- Determine what is being done at worksites to improve the health of employees;

- Understand why certain businesses have programs designed to improve the health of employees;
- Understand why certain businesses do not have health programs for employees; and
- Identify ways to increase fruit and vegetable consumption and physical activity at work.

Although the interviews provided valuable insight, more information was needed on what influences and inhibits business leaders to promote health at the worksite and ways to make fruit and vegetable consumption and physical activity easier to do. Additional focus groups were conducted to obtain this information. Four focus groups were held in San Jose and Los Angeles with business leaders from small/medium-sized businesses that have less than 500 employees. Four more focus groups were conducted in the same locations with leaders from large-sized businesses that have more than 500 employees. Eight to 10 business leaders



METHODS



from various industries were recruited and ultimately participated in each focus group. Once the focus groups were completed, a transcriber listened to audiotapes of each group and created written transcripts of the responses. Two researchers then sorted the data into specific categories, examined the data by site and group, looked for patterns and common themes in the responses by the business leaders, and identified the frequency and range of ideas expressed about each topic.

Focus Groups with Low- and Middle-Income Working Women

To provide a complete picture of what needs to be done in California worksites to improve fruit and vegetable consumption and physical activity, a total of 12 focus groups were conducted in Oakland and Los Angeles with low- and middle-income working women. Four groups were conducted with Spanish-speaking low-income female workers; four with low-

income female workers of mixed ethnicity, which included African American, Anglo, Asian, and English-language dominant Latinas; and four with middle-income female workers of mixed ethnicity who spoke English as their primary language. Eight to 10 working women from various occupations were recruited and participated in each focus group. The low-income groups included women with an annual household income of less than \$20,000. Middle-income groups included women with an annual household income of \$20,000 to \$50,000. During the focus groups, the workers:

- Identified barriers to healthy eating and physical activity at the workplace; and
- Described factors that would encourage them to eat more fruits and vegetables and do physical activity at work.

Once the focus groups were completed, the data were analyzed in the same way as the responses from the business leader focus groups.



RESULTS

Interviews and Focus Groups with Business Leaders

Interviews

Business leaders offered their opinions about employee health and the promotion of fruit and vegetable consumption and physical activity in the workplace. During telephone interviews, they listed unhealthy behaviors they thought affected their employees. As shown in Table 1, smoking, physical inactivity, and poor diet were the most frequently cited unhealthy behaviors among workers.

Table 1. Unhealthy behaviors that affect employees.

Unhealthy Employee Behaviors	Percent
Smoking	58%
Lack of physical activity	38%
Poor diet	28%
Overweight	10%
Alcohol consumption	8%
Overworked	5%
Stress	3%
No unhealthy behaviors	10%

Note: Total percentage exceeds 100 because business leaders listed more than one unhealthy behavior.

To remedy these behaviors, 50 percent of the business leaders stated that their worksites had programs that were intended to promote good health. The most common program offerings were health screenings, health fairs, and flu vaccinations. Business leaders offered these programs to maintain healthy, happy employees and to show employees that management cares about them.

The 50 percent of business leaders who did not have health promotion programs at their worksites suggested that such programs were not seriously considered because they were seen as too costly and/or employees were not interested in participating in them. However, almost all of these leaders (88 percent) believed that there were benefits to offering worksite health promotion programs. The most common benefits included improvements in employee productivity, reduced illness-related absenteeism, and lower employee health care costs.

The business leaders were then asked a series of questions about health behaviors among employees in the workplace. The majority of leaders (55 percent) thought it was important for employees to increase their fruit and vegetable consumption and engage in daily physical activity, and they stated that these behaviors contributed to good health. When the leaders were given a list of worksite policies and were asked about whether or not they thought each policy could be accepted and promoted by their management team, 75 percent supported the idea of making healthy foods available at worksite cafeterias, vending machines, and at other food access points. Most (47 percent) were also in favor of providing incentives for walking, making fitness facilities and equipment available, and providing flexible work schedules to accommodate more physical activity among employees.

The most common benefits of worksite health promotion programs included improvements in employee productivity, reduced illness-related absenteeism, and lower employee health care costs.

RESULTS

Focus Groups

During the focus groups, the business leaders from small/medium- and large-sized companies identified factors that influence their decisions to offer healthy foods and physical activity opportunities at their worksites. They also shared ways that these behaviors could be made easier for their employees to do while at work.

The business leaders stated that worksite health promotion programs have the ability to improve employee productivity, reduce absenteeism, and improve employee morale.

"We hire the whole person, not just their back or mind. I think one measure of our success is the health of our employees."

- San Jose Group

"I am not in HR, but I know those programs that they do for wellness; it is ultimately to keep fit, healthy employees that stay at work and are not out sick. It is a return on the investment."

- San Jose Group

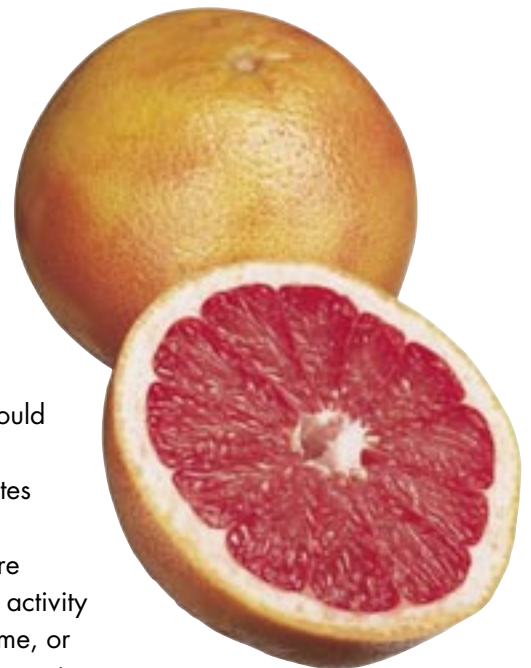
They made it clear, however, that they would need convincing evidence, which indicates that promoting healthy eating and physical activity at worksites improves business profits and productivity.

A partnership opportunity with health plans was mentioned often in the focus groups. In an effort to reduce health care

costs, the leaders suggested that they could partner with health plans to offer services that encourage good dietary practices and physical activity. The leaders also shared that they would be more motivated to promote healthy eating and physical activity at their worksites if their companies were offered tax incentives to do so.

To make healthy eating easier for employees, the business leaders suggested offering more fruits and vegetables in vending machines and at worksite cafeterias; subsidizing employees if they purchase healthy food items at work; offering coupons or discounts for healthy foods purchased either at work or at nearby eateries; having farmers' markets located near worksites; and providing information about personal nutrition.

To make physical activity easier for employees, most business leaders recommended that worksites install facilities where they could change their clothing and freshen up. Several leaders also suggested that companies should provide information about nearby hiking or walking routes and lists of parks, gyms, and other recreational areas where employees could do physical activity either before work, at lunchtime, or after hours. Despite these suggestions, the leaders most frequently cited liability as the greatest and most costly barrier to promoting physical activity at the workplace.



RESULTS

To mitigate the liability risk, most leaders felt that it would be best to partner with a health club or community center to provide off-site opportunities for employee physical activity.



"We want to encourage our employees to be active, but even our legal counsel advised us to make everyone use the elevator instead of the stairs because the stairs could create liability if someone fell."

- Los Angeles Group

Focus Groups with Low- and Middle-Income Working Women

Barriers to healthy eating and physical activity at work

The most frequently cited barrier among low- and middle-income women was a lack of access to healthy foods, such as fruits and vegetables. Every group reported having vending machines that primarily sold junk food, and many women reported that their employers routinely offered unhealthy foods, such as donuts, pastries, and cookies, during meetings and at other workplace gatherings. The women also noted that the easiest foods to access outside of their worksites were at fast food restaurants, which were perceived to be convenient and inexpensive.

"Where I work, there are mostly Chinese restaurants and McDonald's. We have our potlucks and every stinking Wednesday we have cake day for people's birthdays. Then there are times when the company will pay for the employees to have pizza, soda, and stuff."

- Oakland Group

The working women consistently mentioned that lack of time during the workday was the most important barrier to doing physical activity at the workplace. Another significant barrier was the lack of space or facilities to engage in physical activity at their worksites. Even if an empty room in their office was offered for physical activity, most women felt that their employers would not be supportive of using company time to do these activities.

"The only encouragement we have in our building [to be physically active] is when the elevator breaks."

- Oakland Group

Ways to encourage healthy eating and physical activity at work

According to the low- and middle-income working women, the best ways to encourage proper nutrition and physical activity are to surround employees with healthy choices and provide them with opportunities to engage in the behaviors. Specifically, the women suggested that:

RESULTS



- Employers and food vendors offer tasty, affordable, and healthy foods in vending machines and in cafeterias;
- Employers offer fruit and vegetable snacks instead of junk food at meetings, in common work areas, and in break rooms;
- Employers distribute educational materials, such as newsletters, recipes, brochures, and posters, at workplaces that show the benefits of eating fruits and vegetables and how to prepare healthy meals throughout the day;
- Employees receive coupons, subsidies, and/or discounts for purchasing healthy meals either at worksite cafeterias or at restaurants and stores that are located close to workplaces;
- Employees organize healthy food potlucks;
- Worksites have knowledgeable people, like nutritionists, available to provide nutrition information and encourage employees to eat healthier;
- Employers offer discounts or subsidies for fitness club memberships;
- Employers offer on-site physical activity classes;
- Employees have extra time allotted for physical activity either before, during, or after work;
- Employees organize walking clubs and encourage each other to be physically active during breaks; and
- Worksites have showers and changing facilities.

"I'd like to have a group of people that would like to walk real fast at the lunch hour or something."

- Los Angeles Group



CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

... the greatest successes in lifestyle change come when employers help to make it easier for employees to opt for healthy choices.

The interviews and focus groups clearly demonstrated that it is important to promote good health and encourage healthy eating, especially fruit and vegetable consumption, and physical activity at workplaces in California. The low- and middle-income working women frequently shared that they notice and appreciate efforts by their employers to help them lead healthier lifestyles. It was also apparent that the greatest successes in lifestyle change come when employers help to make it easier for employees to opt for healthy choices. Based upon frequently cited statements by business leaders and working women that participated in the research, the three most promising strategies to promote healthy eating and physical activity are:

1. Improve access to healthy foods and physical activity at workplaces;
2. Foster supportive work environments that encourage healthy lifestyle choices; and
3. Establish public policies that bolster health promotion efforts at worksites.

Improve access to healthy foods at workplaces

Healthy foods at meetings

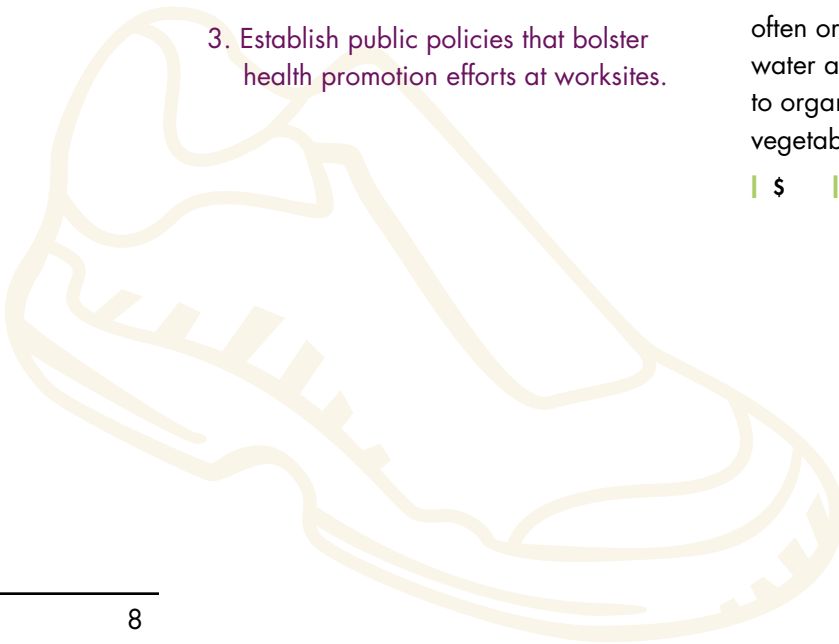
Assure that foods served at meetings are nutritious. Replace doughnuts, coffee, and sodas with 100 percent fruit or vegetable juice, fruits, vegetables, and whole grain bagels as standard fare for meetings. (For healthy, delicious suggestions, see “Guidelines for Offering Healthy Foods at Meetings, Seminars, and Catered Events” at http://www.ahc.umn.edu/ahc_content/colleges/sph/sph_news/nutrition.pdf and the American Cancer Society’s Meeting Well at www.cancer.org/docroot/PED/content/PED_1_5X_Meeting_Well.asp.)

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Healthy snacks

As an alternative to cookies, candy and other sweets at snack stations, some employers currently provide large baskets of fresh fruits and/or vegetables for employees to eat throughout the day. Just as employees often organize to purchase coffee or spring water as a group, encourage employees to organize for group purchases of fruits, vegetables, and other healthy snacks.

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CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS



Potlucks and celebrations

At worksite celebrations and potlucks, encourage healthy alternatives to the usual cake and ice cream, which many employees feel peer pressure or temptation to eat. Items that often receive positive reviews include 100 percent fruit juice, fruit smoothies, fruit puree drizzled on lowfat angel food cake, fruit and vegetable salads, and crunchy vegetables served with lowfat dip. (See www.5aday.com for delicious recipes.)

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Deliver healthy foods

Arrange with local growers or produce distributors to have a box of fresh produce delivered weekly or at regular intervals to each subscribing employee.

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Arrangements with restaurants

Employers can collaborate with nearby restaurants to offer healthy foods to their employees and promote nutritious specials at reasonable prices. Employers and restaurants can further leverage their influence and evaluate their impact by distributing and redeeming employee coupons. Coupons can be used to encourage employees to patronize restaurants that demonstrate concern for their well-being by providing a selection of healthy options. Employers can also use their influence to persuade restaurants to provide nutrition information on all menu choices.

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All recommendations have been rated in terms of cost and ease of implementation. The ratings are as follows:

Low cost

| \$ |

Moderate cost

| \$ \$ |

Quick and easy to implement

| * |

Moderate effort to implement

| * * |

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Catering trucks

Work with catering trucks to encourage them to offer low-cost healthy choices, with an emphasis on fruits and vegetables. Also, persuade catering truck owners to use signs and other forms of advertising to inform customers about their healthy selections, and make coupons available for healthy menu items.

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Farmers' markets

Establish an on-site or neighborhood farmers' market at a workplace or among several workplaces in collaboration with a group of employers.

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Healthy, appealing cafeteria options

Provide appealing menu options at all workplace foodservices and cafeterias at reasonable prices that meet healthy nutrition standards. (See www.publichealthadvocacy.org for examples of nutrition standards.) Also, provide attractive, colorful salad bars at reasonable prices in workplace cafeterias, and prominently display or make nutrition information readily available to employees.

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CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Healthy vending machines

Provide food choices in vending machines that meet healthy nutrition standards. These can include fresh, canned, and dried fruits, 100 percent fruit or vegetable juice, plain or mixed nuts, lowfat bagged snacks, nonfat yogurt and milk, salads, etc. (For additional ideas, visit www.ca5aday.com.)

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Tax deduction for healthy meals

Employers can take advantage of existing tax laws in order to provide healthy foods for their employees on a pre-tax basis and collect for it through payroll deductions. Some employers are providing delicious and nutritious catered meals for their employees pre-tax and at very low costs. This benefit may also be provided by having fresh produce delivered for employees through arrangements made directly with local vendors or growers. It is recommended that employers consult with a tax professional prior to implementing this suggestion.

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Healthy location

New employers or those that are relocating have the opportunity to select a site or existing building within convenient walking distance to parks, recreation facilities, mass transit, and restaurants and stores that offer healthy food choices.

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Improve access to physical activity at workplaces

Making physical activity easier

Support for physical activity comes in a variety of forms. Providing time for physical activity during breaks, meetings, and at lunchtime is a huge endorsement and incentive. Some employers offering scheduled activity breaks during the workday for all employees have reported excellent results in reducing health care, workers' compensation, and disability costs. Support for physical activity can also be provided by encouraging "walking meetings," setting dress codes that allow for comfortable clothing and shoes, and making space available.

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Physical activity facilities

On-site gyms and reimbursement for facility memberships off-site are becoming more common employee benefits that can help some employees fit activity into their day. However, by merely offering fitness facilities or club memberships, an employer must not assume they are being used. They're most effective when they are combined with incentives, encouragement, and workplace cultures that support their use.

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[Fitness facilities are] most effective when they are combined with incentives, encouragement, and workplace cultures that support their use.



CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

For many employees, the best support is an environment in which physical activity can be accomplished with minimal effort within a daily routine.

Active commuting

Implement worksite policies to encourage active transit for commuting to and traveling around the workplace neighborhood.

A worksite might:

- Offer financial incentives for employees who walk, ride a bike, take public transit, or carpool to work;
- Locate workplaces in safe walking distance to dining, shopping, and public transit;
- Provide lockers and showers; and
- Offer safe, secure, and free bike storage.

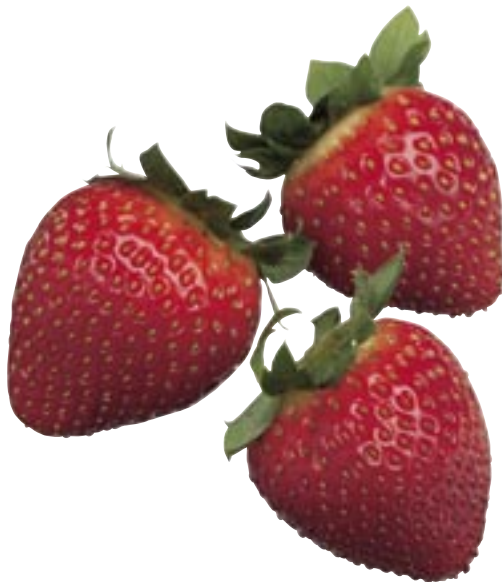
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Facility design

Workplace facility designs can encourage physical activity. For many employees, the best support is an environment in which physical activity can be accomplished with minimal effort within a daily routine. Some helpful workplace design provisions include:

- Open, accessible, attractive stairways prominently located closer to lobbies and foyers than either elevators or escalators. (See “StairWELL to Better Health” at <http://www.cdc.gov/nccdphp/dnpa/stairwell/index.htm>.);
- Free facilities for the secure storage of bicycles used for commuting or work-related travel;
- Showers and changing facilities;
- Workplace location in areas served by public transit as well as safe, well-lighted walking and biking facilities; and
- Space for physical activity at the workplace.

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CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Foster supportive work environments that encourage healthy lifestyle choices

Worksite assessment and information

Emphasize that healthy eating and physical activity are worthwhile core values of an organization that lead to greater health, vitality, and productivity while helping to reduce costs. As part of these core values, employers and employees can work together to assess workplace environments and cultures for their support of healthy eating and physical activity and determine ways in which they can be improved. (See www.ca5aday.com for a workplace assessment tool.) In addition, employees should have access to information at their workplaces on why, how, and where to practice healthy eating and physical activity. This information can be provided through posters, educational materials, videos, or live presentations from health professionals.

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Teamwork and social support

Reward teamwork and social support for employees who adopt and maintain healthy behaviors. Individual and group goals for nutrition and physical activity can be set and achieved through a variety of means:

- Offer team-based, low- or no-cost programs for nutrition and physical activity promotion characterized by an environment of friendly competition with recognition for group and individual achievements;



- Implement the Take Action! employee physical activity promotion program (see www.ca-takeaction.com), link with the *California 5 a Day Worksite Program*, and encourage the use of other programs like 10,000 Steps, Active for Life, or others as appropriate and of interest to employers and employees.

| \$ | * |

All recommendations have been rated in terms of cost and ease of implementation. The ratings are as follows:

Low cost

| \$ |

Moderate cost

| \$ \$ |

Quick and easy to implement

| * |

Moderate effort to implement

| * * |

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Establish public policies that bolster health promotion efforts at worksites

Employer liability for physical activity promotion

Create reasonable liability waivers to protect workplaces and other institutions that provide time, facilities, equipment, or support for physical activity from frivolous lawsuits stemming from activity-related injuries.

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Nutrition standards in workplaces

Healthy food choices at cafeterias in public buildings and vending machines would set an excellent example for employers to follow. Establish foodservice policies in all public buildings such that at least 50 percent of the food served meets guidelines for healthy food choices. (See www.publichealthadvocacy.org for nutrition standards.)

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Facility design policies

Set standards for new construction of workplaces so that their facilities will encourage physical activity, and advocate for local building codes and laws that support healthy workplaces.

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Insurance premium breaks

Work with insurance companies to offer premium breaks for employers on a sliding scale based on their preventive health and wellness initiatives. In addition, provide incentives for health maintenance organizations and health care providers to take more active roles in making prevention a priority.

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Pre-tax spending

Offer pre-tax, flexible spending options to enable employees to pay for eligible health- and wellness-related expenses on a pre-tax basis.

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Work with insurance companies to offer premium breaks for employers on a sliding scale based on their preventive health and wellness initiatives.



RESOURCES

American Cancer Society: Active For Life

http://www.cancer.org/docroot/PED/content/PED_1_5X_Active_For_Life.asp

Offers worksite activity programs and information.

America's Walking

www.pbs.org/americaswalking

Features health and fitness advice from walking advocate, Mark Fenton, as well as information on his America's Walking series.

California 5 a Day — for Better Health! Campaign

www.ca5aday.com

Provides information on promoting 5 to 9 servings of fruits and vegetables and 30 to 60 minutes of physical activity every day.

California Center for Public Health Advocacy

www.publichealthadvocacy.org

Offers Senate Bill 19/school food standards.

California Food Policy Advocates

www.cfpa.net

Improves the health and well being of low-income Californians by increasing access to nutritious, affordable foods.

California Nutrition Network for Healthy, Active Families

www.ca5aday.com

A network of more than 180 projects and initiatives working together to increase fruit and vegetable consumption, physical activity, and food security.

California Task Force on Youth and Workplace Wellness

www.wellnesstaskforce.org

Creates and promotes policies to decrease the obesity rates in California schools and workplaces.

Institute for Health and Productivity Management

www.ihpm.org

Provides data and services related to all aspects of employee health that affect work performance and costs.

Medstat

www.medstat.com

Provides market information, decision support solutions, and research services to improve policy and management decision-making for employers, government agencies, health plans, hospitals, and provider networks.

National Cancer Institute's National 5 A Day Program

www.5aday.gov

Provides science-based information and resources to increase fruit and vegetable consumption to 5 to 9 daily servings.

National Center for Chronic Disease Prevention and Health Promotion

www.cdc.gov/nccdphp

Conducts studies to better understand the causes of chronic diseases, supports programs to promote healthy behaviors, and monitors the health of the nation through surveys.

Produce for Better Health Foundation

www.5aday.com

Provides information, resources, and tools to increase fruit and vegetable consumption to 5 to 9 daily servings.

Shape Up America

www.shapeup.org

Offers information on weight management and increasing physical activity.

Take Action!

www.ca-takeaction.com

Take Action! is a free 10-week worksite health program designed to increase physical activity at the workplace.

The Health Project

<http://healthproject.stanford.edu>

A non-profit private/public consortium that evaluates, promotes, and distributes wellness programs with demonstrated effectiveness in influencing personal health habits and the cost effective use of health care services. Home of the C. Everett Koop National Health Awards.

University of Minnesota, School of Public Health

http://www.ahc.umn.edu/ahc_content/colleges/sph/sph_news/nutrition.pdf

Provides guidelines for offering healthy foods at meetings, seminars, and catering events.

USDA: Food and Nutrition Information Center

www.nal.usda.gov/fnic/dga

Provides information on the Dietary Guidelines for Americans.

World Health Organization, Department of Noncommunicable Disease (NCD) Prevention and Health Promotion

www.who.int/hpr

Provides information on the World Health Organization's Global Strategy on Diet, Physical Activity and Health.





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The California 5 a Day Worksite Program is a statewide public health initiative that empowers low- and middle-income working adults to consume 5 to 9 servings of fruits and vegetables and engage in at least 30 minutes of physical activity every day. The Program is administered in part by the Public Health Institute and is led by the California Department of Health Services in cooperation with the National 5 A Day Program.



For more information, visit us at www.ca5aday.com or call (916) 449-5400.

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