

Workplace Wellness



Workplace Wellness: Designing a Stay Well Stairwell Program

The health and well-being of your employees is critical to your bottom line. In fact, a large percentage of your expenses are employee health care claims, and one of the most influential factors on the health of your employees is their weight. Obesity affects over 30 percent of the U.S. population and leads to health problems such as hypertension, diabetes, stroke and breast cancer. These medical issues will drive up your health-related expenses now and in the future. To combat employee obesity and related health issues, consider implementing a Stay Well Stairwell Program at your company to encourage employees to use the stairs instead of taking the elevator to get to their office spaces.

Many individuals do not take the stairs because they view them as unsafe or unsightly. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's (CDC) Division of Nutrition and Physical Activity conducted a study to determine if physical changes to a stairwell at an Atlanta company would motivate employees to use them more. The CDC concluded that minor changes at a relatively low cost (less than \$16,000) made a huge difference in employee staircase use.

Employer Efforts

Appearance

One of the main perks of taking the elevator is the soothing music, carpeted floor and the lack of effort it takes to simply push a button or two and stand still. The stairs, on the other hand, offer drab walls, concrete floors and an echo. To make staircases more appealing and safe, consider the following improvements:

- Put down carpet or replace torn and worn carpet that is a tripping hazard.
- Add rubber treading for added traction.
- Paint the walls using bright, fun colors.
- Hang up artwork and change it periodically so employees have something new to look at. An inexpensive option is children's drawings and paintings.
- Add track, incandescent or halogen lighting.
- Create themed walls by painting murals that reflect landscapes, warm climates and other feel-good images.
- Install an electronic message board to post announcements or fun facts.

- Paint footsteps from the elevator to the staircase on the floor.

Music

Give your employees some background music to listen to while climbing the stairs by installing a digital satellite music system with speakers on each floor.

Motivation

Everyone needs a little push to change a habit. To encourage employees to make healthier choices when heading to the office, consider posting motivational signs in communal areas between the stairs and elevator. To determine exactly what will motivate your employees, consider holding a focus group with some of your employees to gather their feedback on your ideas. In doing so, encourage both stair and elevator users to participate and ask them to explain what motivates their decisions. Here are some motivators you may wish to place on your signs:

- Do some reps...Take the steps!
- Fight fat...Feel fit...Frequent these flights!
- No time to exercise today? Your opportunity is now!
- Physical activity will add years to your life and life to your years!
- Raise your fitness level, one step at a time.
- Skip the elevator and take a flight for fitness.
- Step up to a healthier lifestyle!

Incentives

If aesthetic changes and inspirational messages are not enough to motivate your employees to use the stairs, they may need a little incentive. Here are some fun ways to encourage employees to start climbing:

- Hold drawings for prizes for staircase users only.
- Have employees keep track of the number of flights they take per month and give prizes to the top three stair climbers.
- Give employees pedometers to use, and award prizes to the department that has the most steps per week or month.

Tracking Usage

When implementing a staircase use program, track its success with video cameras, infrared sensors or direct observation. Tracking usage will help determine if your program was a solid investment.