

FORTUNE

A FITTING SOLUTION

Corporate America is hard at work trying to get their employees in shape. It's a great way to boost productivity and rein in health-care costs.



MARK HOOPER

start!

American Heart Association 
Learn and Live

In the midst of all the uncertainty over health-care reform and what it will cost companies and taxpayers, there is one thing for sure: Healthy employees cost businesses less money. This was confirmed recently in a report from the Partnership for Prevention, a Washington, D.C. group of businesses, nonprofits, and government agencies. Its research shows that every \$1 companies spend on prevention produces \$3.50 in savings from reductions in absenteeism and health-care costs.

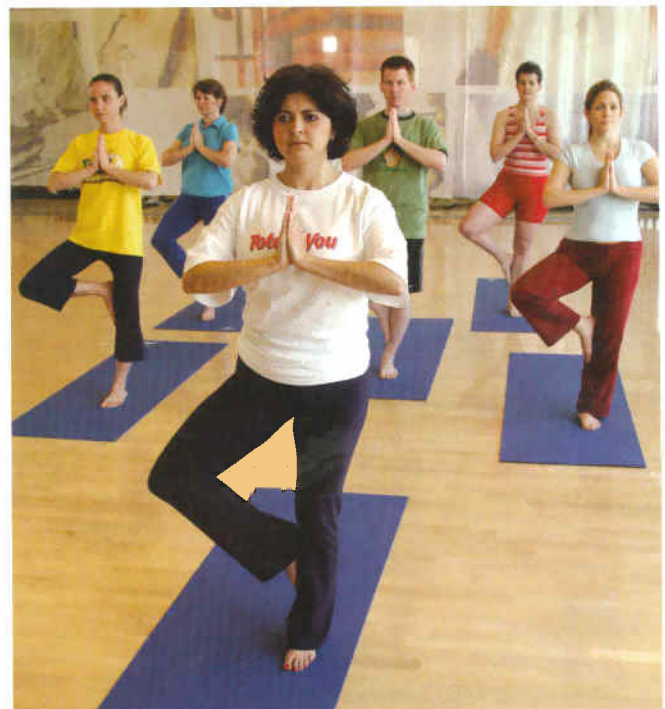
"As health-care costs keep rising, companies are realizing that helping workers get and stay healthy is a smart, effective way to control some of those costs," says Neil Meltzer, national chairman of the American Heart Association (AHA) and president of Sinai Hospital of Baltimore. According to the AHA, asthma, diabetes, and hypertension are associated with 164 million lost workdays a year in the U.S., costing companies a whopping \$30 billion. Obesity costs American businesses another \$12.7 billion a year in medical expenses—and \$225.8 billion in health-related productivity losses. "Anything that gets workers physically active is going to help companies reduce their health-care costs," says Meltzer.

One way to get the ball rolling is the AHA's Start! program, which provides ways for companies to encourage employees to become more physically active and focus on living healthier lives through walking. The cornerstone of the initiative is the Start! Fit-Friendly Companies Recognition Program. Launched in 2007, the program puts the spotlight on companies that create healthy lifestyle programs for their employees in the workplace. In addition to national recognition, the AHA provides participating companies online resources and tools to encourage workers to live more active lives.

Getting employees to focus on better health and nutrition is the goal of every Fit-Friendly company. Each business is also asked to design programs that are appropriate for its own workplace. At Sinai Hospital of Baltimore, says Meltzer, that translates not only into walking trails but also into carpeted, cushioned staircases that have been added to the seven-story building for employees who'd rather walk than take the elevator.

To recognize their hard work and achievements, the American Heart Association gives Worksite Innovation Awards to companies that have come up with new and creative solutions to the fitness challenge, and Community Innovation Awards to those that have included the community in their efforts. Gold status is conferred upon companies that meet criteria for fitness, nutrition, and a health-focused workplace culture. Companies that meet the Gold criteria and demonstrate successful outcomes for their fitness programs achieve Platinum status. The organization recognized more than 1,100 businesses across the country as Start! Fit-Friendly companies in 2009. Eight are profiled on the following pages.

CLOCKWISE: SUNCOR ENERGY EMPLOYEES PARTICIPATE IN COLORADO'S ANNUAL RIDE THE ROCKIES; THE FITNESS CENTER AT CAMPBELL SOUP HEAD-QUARTERS IN NEW JERSEY; WALKING THE WALK AT MEMORIAL HERMANN IN HOUSTON; PRACTICING YOGA IN THE GENERAL MILLS FITNESS CENTER IN MINNEAPOLIS.





SETTING THE TONE

Hearing the message from the top of the organization is important to any program's success. When Steve Lacy became CEO of Des Moines-based national media and marketing company Meredith Corp. in 2006, health-care costs were soaring. "We didn't have a strategy in place for focusing on employee wellness," he says, "but I knew if we did, it would slow down the growth in our health-care costs."

Meredith's first step was to hire Tim O'Neil, an experienced corporate health and wellness expert, as Meredith's wellness manager. Lacy and O'Neil immediately began to develop a comprehensive strategy, including offering health risk assessments (HRAs) nationwide. To encourage participation, the company offers a \$300 reduction in annual health insurance premiums. Any employee with elevated risk factors such as high blood pressure, cholesterol, or glucose has the opportunity to work with a wellness coach to design ways to reduce those risks. O'Neil says 80% of Meredith employees have taken an HRA, and those who have done so for two years have decreased their health care costs by 8%. In comparison, health-care costs for nonparticipants have risen 22%.

Joan McCallen, president and CEO of ICMA-RC, a financial services company based in Washington, D.C., says she always believed that healthier workers would be happier workers. The fact that her company had experienced double-digit increases in its health-care costs for three consecutive years persuaded her to put that belief into action. The company pays the full cost of annual physicals, mammograms, prostate exams, and immunizations. "I'm a big believer in prevention," McCallen says. "Just like retirement savings is a long-term strategy, so too is employee health."

More than 40% of ICMA-RC's employees currently participate in health-risk screenings, up from 20% in 2007. A 10,000-step walking challenge has been especially popular, says McCallen. "Fitness programs at work might be the only time employees have to exercise," she says. It's a strategy that is paying off: This year the company is experiencing a premium increase that is 2.4% lower than the industry average.

MOTIVATION TACTICS

Sometimes it takes a little incentive to get people interested in living a more active life. Doug Layman, executive vice president of Gilsbar, an insurance services company in Covington, La., says the top three elements of its employee wellness program are variety, convenience, and rewards.

One of the most popular features is the opportunity for employees to earn "wellness bucks" by participating in health-related activities. Employees who exercise or attend health seminars or weight-management classes wind up with financial as well as fitness rewards. Wellness bucks can be used to buy vacation days, athletic equipment, personal training sessions, massages, and much more. In 2008, Gilsbar employees

