

Powering employee performance

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Corporate wellness needs nutrition focus



Every company wants a healthy and productive workforce, and there's growing awareness of the benefits of including nutrition in employee wellness programmes. Without this focus, the workplace can inadvertently foster unhealthy eating habits. Employees under work and time pressures can find their food choices are limited by what's available to them at or near their workplace. It can be all too easy to grab nutrition-poor take-aways and snacks for an energy boost to get you through the workday.

Monique Piderit, a Registered Dietitian and spokesperson for [ADSA](#) (Association for Dietetics in South Africa) says, "Employees spend a third of the day at work and most of our meals and snacks are consumed in this time. This makes the workplace an ideal, targeted opportunity for companies to drive the importance of healthy and balanced lifestyles. Good nutrition underlines almost every aspect of health and wellness. We also need to consider the indirect costs for employers related to overweight and obesity, which could well overshadow the direct costs of nutrition interventions. Studies have shown that nutrition-related worksite health promotion programmes have the potential to reduce obesity by 5-10%, thereby increasing labour productivity by 1-2% which is a great cost benefit for any company."

Companies that recognise the value of including nutrition in their corporate wellness programmes employ a range of strategies that can improve the availability of healthy foods, provide nutrition education and provide nutrition-based interventions. All of this helps to integrate healthy living into the essence of corporate culture.

Ntokozo Kgopa, who is also an ADSA spokesperson and Registered Dietitian, highlights some of the practical ways companies promote healthy eating in the workplace. She says that it helps to have a staff canteen or on-site shop offering balanced meals and healthy snacks. "Canteen staff must be trained in preparing and serving healthy meals," Ntokozo says. "It's important they have knowledge of fresh ingredients, healthy cooking methods and portion sizes. A dietitian can help to create a menu of nutritionally balanced meals that are in line with the South African Food-Based Dietary Guidelines and

take into account that there is inevitably a range of food preferences and dietary requirements in any workforce.”

Ntokozo also suggests that:

1. The Corporate Wellness Programme can include wellness days where a registered dietitian or registered nutritionist presents health talks. This may include interventions where employees receive anthropometric measurements and screenings for nutrition-related conditions such as Type 2 Diabetes.
2. Some workplaces have a dedicated Employee Wellness Centre where employees can engage with rotating cast of healthcare providers such as a doctor, dietitian, psychologist, social worker or biokineticist. Tele-health consultations can also be facilitated in the workplace.
3. Workplaces can promote healthy eating messages and content that it is shared via communication channels such TV screens or the internal corporate digital platforms, as well as in dining or chill areas. Health Awareness Calendar Days can also be promoted through such channels.
4. Companies can focus on making drinking water easily available throughout the workplace including in meeting and events venues.
5. If there are vending machines in the workplace, then it is important that these offer sugar-free drinks and healthy snack options.
6. Companies are increasingly creating spaces and time for employees to exercise. Using the company gym can be incentivised through reward systems or fun challenges. Employees can be encouraged to take part in external sporting events through enabling and promoting corporate teams.

Wellness boosts employee engagement

Monique points out that more and more people are embracing healthy lifestyles, and therefore employees find value in a workplace that actively fosters wellness. She says, “Research has shown that investing in preventative health measures like workplace wellness interventions which include nutrition result in great benefits to both the employee and the company. Employers experience benefits such as reduced absenteeism, better productivity, reduced rates of illness, and more engaged employees. Healthy and well-nourished employees are naturally going to be more focused and energised and thus more efficient and productive.”

Of course, individuals are the ones who are in the driving seat when it comes to their personal health and wellness.

Three top ways to improve your nutrition at work are:

1. **Bring your own** – you are more likely to consistently eat better and be in full control if you bring home-prepared meals and snacks with you to work. That way you know exactly what ingredients have been used and you can avoid additives, unnecessary salt, sugar, and unhealthy fats, and control your portion size.
2. **If you have to buy, choose wisely** – it’s not always possible to pack your own work lunch, but you can still make healthier choices. Avoid fast foods and choose more fresh vegetables, fruits, nuts, wholewheat bread sandwiches, wholewheat wraps, brown rolls and grilled white meat without visible fat or skin. Avoid adding packet sauces and condiments as these tend to be high in salt, sugar and fats which are linked to ‘lifestyle’ diseases.
3. **Focus on healthy hydration** – if drinking water is not easily to hand in your workplace, get into the habit of bringing your own water bottle to work. Be intentional about limiting sugary drinks. To add more flavour to water, pop slices of fruit or mint into your water bottle for a refreshing infusion.

In celebration of Corporate Wellness Week, 3 to 7 July 2023, here are some inspiring ADSA recipes for easy, healthy workday snacks:



[Spiced Sweet Potato Bread](#)



[Mexican Salad](#)



[Choc-nut Smoothie](#)



[Egg Muffins](#)

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