

## **California Fit Business Tips of the Month Background Information**

The main goal of the California Fit Business Tips of the Month (Fit Business Tips) is to help working Californians eat the recommended amounts of fruits and vegetables and get at least 60 minutes of physical activity every day. In a nation that has become increasingly dependent on unhealthy food and a sedentary lifestyle, it is important that employees understand healthier options in order to change attitudes and behaviors about nutrition and physical activity.

The Fit Business Tips are part of a larger set of materials called the *Fit Business Kit*. The *Fit Business Kit* is provided by the *California 5 a Day—Be Active! Worksite Program* to help California employers promote wellness at the workplace. The *Kit* was first unveiled at the California Fit Business Awards ceremony in July 2005, where the California Task Force on Youth and Workplace Wellness and the *California 5 a Day—Be Active! Worksite Program* recognized six employers in California for their workplace wellness practices.

### **Improving Productivity in the Workplace**

Employers increasingly bear the cost as their employees continue to engage in unhealthy eating habits and remain inactive while at work. Fifty-seven percent of all Californian adults are overweight or obese, which puts them at an increased risk of disease and illness.<sup>1</sup> Added costs are borne by employers who see their insurance rates and workers' compensation premiums go up as productivity declines. Unhealthy workers require more medical care, take more sick days, and are less productive on the job.<sup>2</sup>

### **Increasing Healthy Eating Options at Work**

One of the most effective ways to encourage employees to make better food choices at work is to make healthy foods readily available through various means. Management can work with outside food vendors, catering services, and on-site food services to ensure that healthy food options are always available for employees. Simply providing nutrition information for food items and encouraging the availability of healthy entrees, salads, and fruits and vegetables are proven steps employers can take to increase healthy options in the workplace.

### **Educating Employees**

Educating employees on the importance of eating the daily recommended amounts of fruits and vegetables and getting at least 60 minutes of physical activity every day is paramount to their health and overall well-being. Surprisingly, many adults do not understand how they can incorporate healthy habits into their daily lives and at work. The goal of the Fit Business Tips is provide employees with practical suggestions to help

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<sup>1</sup> California Behavioral Risk Factor Survey, 2003 data. Survey Research Group, Cancer Surveillance Section, California Department of Health Services, Sacramento, CA 2002

<sup>2</sup> Work Loss Data Institute. (2001). *2001 Occupational Disability Guidelines*. San Antonio, TX: Author.

them incorporate fruits and vegetables and physical activity into their daily workday routine.

### **Offering Physical Activity Support**

Employers can encourage physical activity by offering lockers and changing space for those employees who wish to exercise at lunch. Providing secure bike racks or locked bike storage is another practical way employers can encourage employees to be active. Employers can also promote “walking meetings” or “physical activity breaks” throughout the day to encourage all employees to remain active while at work.

## ***How to Distribute the California Fit Business Tips of the Month***

Here are some tips on how you can distribute the California Fit Business Tips of the Month to your employees.

**E-mail:** If your employees have access to e-mail, a great way to distribute the “Tips” is utilizing the company’s e-mail database. E-mail is a quick and efficient way to ensure all employees have access to the tips.

**Break Room/Cafeteria/Kitchen:** The break room, cafeteria, or kitchen are some of the best spots to post the “Tips” since these are highly frequented areas within a worksite where employees can implement healthier food choices.

**Vending machines:** Post the tips on or near the company vending machine to remind employees to make a healthy choice every day.

**Employee Newsletter:** If your company provides a monthly newsletter, the “Tips” will be an excellent way to get the message out about making healthy choices in the workplace. Another idea would be to do a “Caught in the Act” photo, in addition to the tips, picturing employees “caught” in the workplace engaging in physical activity and making healthy food choices.

**Locker Rooms:** Posting the “Tips” in an onsite locker room is the perfect reinforcement for employees who are able to engage in some form of physical activity while at work.

## ***Recommendations to Employers on Promoting Worksite Wellness***

The California Fit Business Tips of the Month are designed for employees to learn ways in which they can take steps to improve their health at work. Here are some ways in which employers can also help promote worksite wellness to their employees.

**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, low-fat bagged snacks, nonfat yogurt and milk, salads, etc.

**Active commuting:** Offer safe, secure, and free bike storage for those employees who choose to bike to work. Offer financial incentives to employees who walk, ride a bike, or take public transit. Locate workplaces in safe walking distance to dining, shopping, and public transit.

**Break room foods:** Replace doughnuts, coffee, and sodas with 100 percent fruit or vegetable juice, fruits, vegetables, and whole grain bagels.

**Restaurant partnerships:** Develop partnerships with local restaurants in the area to provide low cost healthy alternatives (i.e. “healthy lunch menu”) for customers during work hours.

**Healthy cafeteria options:** Provide appealing menu options at all worksite foodservices and cafeterias at reasonable prices that meet healthy 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.

**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 a very low cost. This benefit may also be provided by having fresh produce delivered for employees through arrangements made directly with local vendors or growers.

For more information on improving workplace wellness and to view the Fit Business Kit, visit the *California 5 a Day—Be Active! Worksite Program* Web site at [www.ca5aday.com/worksite](http://www.ca5aday.com/worksite).



## **About the *California 5 a Day—Be Active! Worksite Program***

The *California 5 a Day—Be Active! Worksite Program* is a statewide public health initiative that empowers low- and middle-income working adults to consume the recommended amounts of fruits and vegetables and enjoy physical activity every day.

The Program also catalyzes the establishment of workplace environments where these behaviors are socially supported and easy to do. The promotion of fruit and vegetable consumption and physical activity is so important because these behaviors help to reduce the risks of many chronic diseases, including heart disease, cancer, stroke, type 2 diabetes, musculoskeletal problems, and obesity. The Program, administered in part by the Public Health Institute and led by the California Department of Health Services in cooperation with the National 5 A Day Program, is funded by the United States Department of Agriculture Food Stamp Program and the Preventive Health and Health Services Block Grant of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

### **Formative Research**

To fully understand what needs to be done to increase fruit and vegetable consumption and physical activity at worksites throughout California, the *5 a Day—Be Active! Worksite Program* conducted formative research. This consisted of:

- An extensive review of the literature and existing programs;
- Interviews and focus groups with business leaders; and
- Focus groups with low- and middle-income working adults.

Based upon the research, the three most promising strategies to promote healthy eating and physical activity at work 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.

### **Program Development**

The *5 a Day—Be Active! Worksite Program* is pursuing these strategies by publicizing the results of the formative research to employers, public health professionals, the media, and policymakers throughout California. Included in the formative research report are specific recommendations on how best to shape worksite environments so that fruit and vegetable consumption and physical activity are a natural part of the workday (see [www.ca5aday.com/worksite](http://www.ca5aday.com/worksite) for the report). In addition, the *5 a Day—Be Active! Worksite Program* is developing and pilot testing tools and programs to help employers and health professionals encourage these healthy behaviors at worksites.

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