The Costs of Physical Inactivity and Poor Nutrition in Canada

Did you know?

According to a 1997 Heart Health Surveys Research Group article (source: Canadian Medical Association Journal), more than 50% of Canadian adults are overweight (i.e., they have a Body Mass Index [BMI] >25); and over 30% are technically obese (i.e., BMI >27).

The Cost to Employees:

Think about the average day for the average Canadian employee; it is a disaster waiting to happen. The employee will drive a car to work rather than walk, cycle or use public transit; will use an elevator at work instead of climbing the stairs; will sit in front of a computer for eight to 10 hours; will eat lunch at a desk rather than go for a brisk walk; will spend evening in front of a computer or television; and will take the car instead of walking if a late-night trip to the store is necessary.

There isn't much calorie-burning in that common scenario. Yet Canadians are among the biggest eaters in the world, consuming an average of 2,921 calories daily and getting one-third of those calories from fat. As a result of physical inactivity and poor nutrition there are numerous health risks that many employee's face.

Some of these health risks include:

- Lack of energy
- Depression
- Low back strain
- Cardiovascular-respiratory illness
- Osteoporosis
- Obesity
- High blood pressure
- Adult-onset diabetes
- Stroke
- Colon cancer
- Heart disease

The Cost to Canadian Companies:

When employees choose a sedentary and unhealthy lifestyle, they affect their company's bottom line in a negative way. Research indicates that there may be increased costs for companies that have a medium to high percentage of physically inactive employees who also have poor nutritional habits. These costs include: increased employee benefit costs, reduced productivity, decreased employee satisfaction, increased absenteeism, increased short and long-term disability payments, higher turn-over rates as well as increased levels of worker's compensation. Fatigue, inattention, and accidents are also more common among inactive employees.

Below are several statistics on how inactive and unhealthy employees affect Canadian companies in a negative way.

- A recent CDC study found that employees who are inactive incurred annual direct medical costs that are $330 more than the costs for employees who are physically active.
- Employee's stress-related problems cost Canadian business $12 billion a year, and much of that stress can be prevented. (Employee Absenteeism, Conference Board of Canada, 1993).
- Employees who smoke cost companies between $2,308 to $2,613 more per year than non-smoking employees. This is due to increased absenteeism, lost productivity, and increased health and life insurance premiums. Studies have shown that physical activity helps employees to quit smoking. (1997 Labour Canada Study)

The Costs to the Economy:

On December 16, 1999, the Canadian Institute for Health Information (CIHI) reported that spending on Canada's health-care system was expected to reach $86 billion for 1999, which represented a 5.1% increase from 1998. In 1997, Canada spent an estimated $78 billion on health care, which represented an increase of 3.1% from 1996. These trends suggest that if rapid change does not occur, health-care costs will continue to escalate, particularly since Canada's population is aging.

- Cardiovascular disease: $7.3 billion nationally
- Cancer: $3.2 billion nationally
- Arthritis: $1.1 billion nationally
- Osteoporosis: $1.3 billion nationally
- Mental health: $1 billion in British Columbia

More than half of these costs are attributed to illnesses that are preventable!

Estimate What Inactivity and Poor Health Costs Your Company!

How many sick days were taken by all of your employees last month?

How many of your employees smoke?

What percentage of all your employees are working at their full capacity?

How much did your company spend on medical claims and workers compensation last year? Do you think it?s possible to reduce that number?

How much money did your company lose last year due to inactive and unhealthy employees?

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