

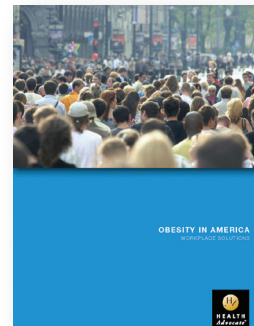
FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Health Advocate Releases Obesity White Paper: Strategies and Programs to Reduce Obesity in the Workplace

Plymouth Meeting, PA: February 2, 2009. Employers spend more than \$13 billion annually in medical costs and lost productivity due to obesity—dubbed the world’s number one health threat by the CDC. Obese workers are sicker, miss more days of work, are more prone to injury and accidents and incur higher medical costs than employees of average weight. Now, there is a guidepost to help employers address this issue.

Health Advocate™, the nation’s leading independent healthcare advocacy and assistance company, has produced an insightful, fact-based white paper, **“Obesity in America: Workplace Solutions”**. The report details the latest research on the impact of obesity in the workplace, case studies of companies that have implemented successful programs to address this health issue and a how-to list that employers can use to lower healthcare costs.

“Our research and experience indicates that employers can offer cost-effective programs in the workplace to help employees with weight problems and also reduce the burgeoning costs associated with the impact of obesity,” said Abbie Leibowitz, M.D., Chief Medical Officer, Health Advocate, Inc.



Obesity Spikes Healthcare Costs

“Employers are making the connection between unhealthy employees, lower productivity and higher costs. And obesity is a major contributor to avoidable health care costs,” says Tom Wolk, M.D., Senior Vice President of Clinical Operations at Health Advocate. The company’s core service helps employees resolve healthcare issues, including finding doctors, specialists and services that often relate to chronic conditions such as diabetes, high blood pressure or heart disease. “The volume of calls we receive concerning these issues has increased as the obesity epidemic in America has taken hold,” Wolk says.

The white paper notes that obesity is related to the development of dozens of chronic—and costly diseases—which account for nearly 75 percent of healthcare spending. What’s more, obesity rates have doubled in the past two decades, accounting for nearly 30 percent of the increase in healthcare spending the country has experienced over that time.

The Startling Facts

Compared to normal-weight counterparts, obese workers:

- Are twice as likely to file a worker’s compensation claim
- Have medical costs seven times higher
- Lose about 13 times more days of work from work injury or illness, according to a Duke University Medical Center Analysis
- On average, it costs a firm of 1,000 employees \$285,000 per year in extra costs

The Workplace as Change Agent

Today's workers tend to be more sedentary and tend to eat higher-calorie snacks, often due to a lack of healthier choices and limited lunchtimes. These are a few of the reasons that make the workplace uniquely positioned to help counter unhealthy habits that can result in lowered healthcare costs. The white paper points out:

- Nearly half of employees report gaining weight on the job
- 66 percent of employees surveyed welcome employer-based weight loss programs
- Partnering with community resources can provide easy-to-install weight loss programs at the worksite
- Powerful incentives include offering programs during work hours and access to wellness coaches
- Effective solutions include: offering healthier vending machine snacks, and incentivizing employees to get active with Health Risk Assessments
- Two, half hour exercise breaks twice weekly can help employees lose weight, lower their blood pressure and increase their on-the-job productivity, according to one study.
- Company case studies include IBM: just months into its wellness plan implementation, workers were eating 20 percent less junk food

The white paper and accompanying checklist is designed to provide employers with useful information and easy to implement incentives to help deal with the obesity epidemic.

To order a free copy of "Obesity in America: Workplace Solutions" and our accompanying checklist, call Health Advocate at: 866-385-8033 (toll-free) or email us at info@HealthAdvocate.com.

About Health Advocate

Health Advocate, Inc., the nation's leading independent health advocacy and assistance company, serves more than 4,300 employers representing 14+ million Americans. Our core advocacy service, centers around a team of highly trained medical and benefits experts who help members resolve a full range of healthcare and insurance-related issues. The company also offers a range of advocacy, HR and wellness solutions to clients of all sizes.

Founded in 2001, the company is headquartered in suburban Philadelphia with sales offices in major cities. Health Advocate has been recognized as one of America's fastest growing private companies by Inc. 500. Philadelphia Magazine has rated Health Advocate as one of the region's Top 20 Places to Work.

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