



Many employers are supporting work-site wellness programs and finding a significant ROI (Return on Investment). Joyce Boyes, a human resources manager at a Massachusetts hospital, wanted to lose weight. When her employer pressed employees to get fitter, she took up the challenge. One year and 50 fewer pounds later, the employee-compensation manager is a model for how [employer-sponsored health programs](#) are supposed to work.

*"This program was a starting point,"* Boyes says. And her healthier habits stuck to the point that her doctor reduced the amount of a cholesterol-fighting drug that she takes.

**State and federal health-care reforms** require employers to cover a greater share of their staff. This means companies are on the hook for higher payments to insurers. U.S. health-care costs are rising rapidly, fueled by greater spending on prescription drugs, the increasing prevalence of chronic illness, and an aging population. Obesity alone costs U.S. companies as much as \$45 billion annually, according to a 2008 report by the Conference Board, a nonprofit research group.

**In an effort to contain health care costs** many employers are conducting health screenings and tracking staffers' nutrition choices and workouts. Participation in wellness programs can be encouraged by offering incentives ranging from cash to health-insurance discounts in exchange for meeting health and fitness goals.

**A trend we're likely to see more of** incorporates *participation* in wellness programs as a part of their employee performance review.

**The goals are the same: to make employees fitter** and reduce health-care expenses. "A small group that's not healthy is increasing the cost for everyone," says Jodi Fuller, director of global benefits at packaging maker MeadWestvaco. "As a benefits director, what can I do to lower those costs?" she asks. Healthier eating and exercise has long been recognized to contribute to a reduction in chronic diseases.

**Regular health assessments are key** to the early detection of diseases such as cancer, improving patients' survival rates and containing employers' costs. The average cost per patient when one is diagnosed early with prostate cancer is \$22,430 per year, but the expense jumps to \$91,268 for a late-stage diagnosis, according to health-insurance companies.

**Work-site wellness programs** have grown exponentially in the past 15 years. In general, fitness and wellness programs result in increased levels of fitness and a reduction in the risk factors for coronary heart disease and diabetes. Recent research using control groups has found relations between reduction in health care costs, turnover, and absenteeism and implementation of comprehensive health promotion programs. If you have interest as an employer or employee in wellness, check out the [CDC Work-life Site](#).