

**FRESH  
MARKET**



# **NUTRITION IN THE WORKPLACE**

**SUPPORTING A SAFE WORK ENVIROMENT**

**PREMIER FOOD GROUP**

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## OVERVIEW

Successful businesses are well aware of the impact that safety programs have to their bottom line. A healthy and productive workforce along with a stellar safety record can mean the difference between success and failure.

Business owners know a substantial investment in safety training turns into enormous cost savings by reducing their share of the \$170 billion per year spent on injury and illnesses in this country.<sup>1</sup> **Safety programs** traditionally focus on environmental, ergonomic, physical and chemical issues, among others. One of the most prevalent risks to both safety and productivity, however, is often the most overlooked: **the nutritional and physical health** of the employees themselves.

Poor nutrition, hydration and physical health can lead to a host of factors that **increase the risk** of poor performance, accidents, injury, and low productivity. According to the Centers of Disease Control and Prevention, “the indirect costs of poor health—including absenteeism, disability, and reduced work output—may be several times higher than direct medical costs. Productivity losses related to personal and family health problems cost U.S. employers \$1,685 per employee per year, or \$225.8 billion annually.”<sup>2</sup>

## DAILY BALANCED NUTRITION: A Primary Safety Issue

Although employee wellness programs have grown popular as business owners become more aware of health issues, they usually focus on educational opportunities, weight loss competitions, and physician wellness visits. While all of these are important interventions that can reduce medical costs, they do not address the direct link that nutrition and health have to safety of operations on a daily basis. **Access to proper nutrition and hydration is paramount to reducing the risk of accidents caused by a poorly performing employee.** Safety programs address other primary risks through hands-on training and the provision of the proper equipment, but most do not address the need for appropriately spaced, high quality meals as a grassroots, first line defense against accidents. In most cases this is due to a lack of understanding of the significant role that good nutrition plays in creating a safe work environment through optimal employee functioning.

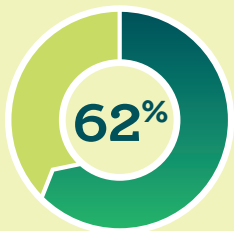
Many workers spend the majority of their waking hours at work, but often employers consider accessibility to nutritious food is an afterthought. Quick and inexpensive meals are often what companies look for, as food provision is seen as a benefit to the employee but a cost to the company. As companies may save money on the front end, employees consume a high intake of unbalanced meals and processed food on a daily basis. At worst, meals are completely skipped. Both of these scenarios put employees at risk for increased accidents, injury and suboptimal performance, and in the long run are a cost liability for the company.

**A steady intake of balanced and nutritious food is essential to keeping the body functioning at its best and preventing mental and physical fatigue that can lead to accidents and low work output.** Proper brain function is impossible without good quality carbohydrate intake consistently throughout the day. Skipped meals cause a drop in blood sugar, which results in poor concentration, shakiness, irritability, low

energy, and in extreme cases causes fainting, all of which raise the risk of accidents and injury. Employees who consume poor quality food, such as vending machine options or pre-prepared, processed meals may also show signs of suboptimal bodily functioning. Research has shown that cognitive function and alertness—necessary to recognize potential accidents and respond quickly enough to avoid them—are directly related to the consumption of high quality protein.<sup>3</sup> Along with proteins and healthy carbohydrates, consumption of vitamins and minerals found in fresh fruits and vegetables is related to higher energy levels. Fatigue is a major workplace hazard that causes symptoms such as dizziness, weakness, difficulty concentrating, and poor eye-hand coordination. Employees often do not realize that their thinking is impaired, and they fail to recognize and respond to problems that can lead to both minor and major mishaps. Consuming adequate energy and balanced nutrition can prevent such fatigue and its consequences. Proper hydration is also crucial, as a 1% decrease in hydration levels can be associated with as much as a 20% decrease in work productivity.<sup>3</sup>

In the US, malnutrition results not from a lack of food, but from a lack of good quality food in the typical American diet. Poor quality, processed food is cheap and convenient, seemingly a benefit for both companies providing food and employees consuming it. But this type of food is higher in calories, saturated fat, sodium and sugar, and is lower in vitamins and minerals than freshly prepared food. The resulting overconsumption of energy and under-consumption of nutrients has led to a problematic combination of obesity and malnourishment in our country. **This presents unique issues in the workplace that can affect a business' safety record,** and as a result its bottom line, as obese workers have a 40-49% higher risk of occupational injury including strains, sprains, lower limb and torso injury and falls.<sup>4</sup> In addition, common nutrient deficiencies such as calcium, vitamin D, and iron can lead to weaker bones and muscles, also increasing injury risk.

### EMPLOYEES AND HEALTH IN THE WORKPLACE



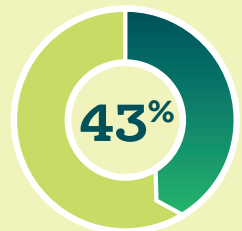
feel that workplace wellness activities are successful



feel it encourages them to work harder



feel they have more energy and are more productive



feel wellness programs lead them to miss fewer days at work

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## THE BOTTOM LINE: Cost Savings Of Better Nutrition

Providing employees with timely, freshly prepared meals consisting of balanced nutrients from a variety of food groups can help reduce all of the above common nutritional problems and in the process prevent a host of negative consequences related to both safety and productivity. Companies may question the added nutrition cost; however like other aspects of a safety programs, the return on investment can be substantial. Less food is wasted as consumption improves when the food offerings are more appealing and taste better. **As consumption improves, employee energy levels rise, thought processes are clearer, fatigue is warded off and therefore the work environment becomes more productive and safe,** both cost benefits. With adequate vitamin and mineral intake from freshly prepared fruits, vegetables and complete proteins employees have stronger immune systems resulting in fewer absences. In addition, offering quality food at work can prevent overeating outside of work, which can help employees maintain a healthy weight. As obesity rates drop, so do risks for injury and illness related to excess weight and the chronic diseases that follow. Good quality meals offered in a comfortable space with adequate time, in addition to improving worker productivity and safety, can also offer a fringe benefit: improved employee morale.

Companies will be increasingly affected financially by the declining health of the US population. Over 30% of the adult population is now considered obese and 50% suffer from at least one chronic disease.<sup>5,6</sup> Compounding the problem, chronic disease is no longer a disease of the older population. Based on widely accepted life expectancy data, for the first time in US history the current young generation will have a shorter average lifespan than the generation before it.<sup>8</sup> As people begin dealing with chronic disease and lower fitness levels at increasingly younger ages, employers will have to deal with the consequences of poor health in both their veteran and new employees. **An investment in a good quality food program is an investment in employees themselves, and in their ability to work safely and effectively for a company.** As much as nutritious food is a basic necessity to humans, so should quality food provisions for employees be considered a basic necessity to a safe, successful, and cost-conscious company.

## THE HEALTH DECLINE OF THE U.S. WORKFORCE DUE TO POOR DIET

**Over 30%**  
of U.S. adults are now  
classified as obese...



...leading to a  
**40-49% Higher**  
risk of occupational injuries



## SOURCES

- 1 Occupational Safety & Health Administration (OSHA)
- 2 Center for Disease Control & Prevention (CDC)
- 3 4imprint Blue Papers
- 4 National Center for Biotechnology Information (NCBI)
- 5 Center for Disease Control & Prevention (CDC)
- 6 American College of Occupational & Environmental Medicine (ACOEM)
- 7 Accident Compensation Corporation of New Zealand (ACC)
- 8 New England Journal of Medicine (NEJM)
- 9 Employer Healthcare & Benefits Congress (EHBC)