



## Workplace Health Promotion for Employees

### Why is health important?

*Health is not everything, but without health, everything is nothing (Schopenhauer, 1788-1860, German philosopher)*

Schopenhauer is not the only person to have realised the innate value of health. Four out of five European residents say that good health is crucial for their quality of life<sup>(1)</sup>. Chronic disease has a major impact on quality of life. Many chronic diseases – e.g. heart diseases, type 2 diabetes, and cancer – can be largely prevented by a healthy lifestyle. These changes include improving the diet, enhancing physical fitness, and quitting smoking<sup>(2)</sup>.

### What is Workplace Health Promotion?

Workplace health promotion (WHP) encompasses everything done by employers, their employees, and society to improve the health and well-being of people at work. It includes:

1. Improving the way work is organised, for example by:
  - enabling flexible working time;
  - offering flexible work places such as work from home (teleworking);
  - providing possibilities for lifelong learning such as job rotation and job enlargement.
2. Improving the working environment, for example by:
  - encouraging support from colleagues;
  - getting employees to participate in the work environment improvement process;
  - offering healthy canteen food.
3. Encouraging employees to get involved in healthy activities, for example by:
  - offering sports classes;
  - providing bicycles for travelling short distances within big work sites.
4. Encouraging personal development, for example by:
  - offering courses on social competences, like dealing with stress;
  - helping employees to quit smoking.

WHP means more than simply meeting the legal requirements for health and safety; it also means employers actively helping their staff improve their own general health and well-being<sup>(3)</sup>. Within this process it's essential to involve employees and to take into account their needs and views on how to organise work and the workplace.



### Remember!

- Your lifestyle is private. You can be encouraged but never forced to change your behaviour – unless you are causing harm to others;
- Taking part in any health promotion activity at work is voluntary. However, living healthy is always primarily in your own interest;
- WHP requires active commitment from both sides: employers offering healthy organisational and environmental conditions and employees actively taking part in the WHP programme.

### Examples of WHP activities:

1. Work-life balance
  - providing social support, such as crèche facilities.
2. Improving and maintaining mental health, for example by
  - implementing a participative management, accounting for employees' views and opinions;
  - providing stress reduction trainings, relaxation courses, and confidential psychological counselling.
3. Looking after health
  - offering regular health checks to monitor blood pressure, cholesterol, and blood sugar levels.
4. Physical activity
  - helping with the cost of physical activities outside work, such as sports or leisure centre memberships;
  - organising sports events within the organisation;
  - encouraging employees to take the stairs rather than using the elevator.
5. Promoting a healthy lifestyle
  - offering confidential support and information about alcohol and drugs;
  - promoting information on healthy eating and providing good facilities for turning advice into practice (e.g. providing healthy canteen food and sufficient time to eat it).

<sup>(1)</sup> <http://www.eurofound.europa.eu/areas/qualityoflife/eqls/2007/index.htm>

<sup>(2)</sup> [http://www.euro.who.int/mediacentre/PR/2006/20060908\\_1](http://www.euro.who.int/mediacentre/PR/2006/20060908_1) & [http://www.who.int/chp/about/integrated\\_cd/en/](http://www.who.int/chp/about/integrated_cd/en/)

<sup>(3)</sup> [http://www.who.int/occupational\\_health/topics/workplace/en/index1.html](http://www.who.int/occupational_health/topics/workplace/en/index1.html)

## What you can do to improve your own health

Why not encourage your employer to improve (or begin) health promotion activities by sharing your ideas with your employer and your representatives? Use our factsheet on workplace health promotion for employers to support your case.

Remember that initiatives need not come solely from your employer, everyone can improve their personal health and well-being. Here are some examples:

### Food at work

Healthy eating can be straightforward. Here are some tips <sup>(\*)</sup>:

- eat a variety of foods and consume plenty of fruit and vegetables;
- eat moderate portions and remember it's better to reduce the amount of less healthy foods in your diet than try to eliminate them completely;
- eat regularly;
- start now and make gradual changes.

### Stress at work

There are many ways of minimising stress. The first step is becoming aware of the things that you find stressful. Then you can tackle them, for example by:

- avoiding stressful situations, such as morning traffic: why not take the metro instead?
- learning to say 'no' if you feel that agreeing to a task would exceed your limits;
- incorporating relaxation breaks into your schedule;
- talking to your supervisor about your situation;
- being aware of the symptoms of stress, such as sleeping problems or concentration problems. Listen to your body's signals;
- speaking to your medical practitioner if the symptoms persist.

### Stay active

Adults need at least 30 minutes of moderate physical activity most days of the week. This enhances their physical and mental well-being and helps prevent weight gain. Exercise is also important to reduce the risk of cancer, heart disease and depression <sup>(\*)</sup>.

<sup>(\*)</sup> <http://www.eufic.org/article/en/health-and-lifestyle/healthy-eating/artid/healthy-eating-positive-experience/>; <http://www.eufic.org/index/en/>

<sup>(\*)</sup> [http://www.euro.who.int/mediacentre/PR/2006/20061117\\_1](http://www.euro.who.int/mediacentre/PR/2006/20061117_1)

Here are some simple ideas to increase the amount of exercise you get:

- take the stairs whenever possible: you could try to walk up at least one floor before taking the elevator,
- walk short distances instead of taking the bus or car: consider skipping the first bus stop and walking to the second,
- consider cycling to work,
- place the printer some distance from your desk if you work in an office. This will increase the amount you walk each day,
- take part in sports or other physical activities offered at your workplace.

There are thousands of other ways of increasing your physical activity by, for example, doing exercises by yourself or in sports classes.

### Some facts about smoking

Tobacco is the number one cause of preventable deaths in the world. Tobacco kills up to one in two long-term users, half in their middle ages. In the EU, over 650,000 people are killed every year by smoking <sup>(\*)</sup>.

There are plenty of other reasons for quitting smoking:

- you will feel fitter as your breathing becomes more regular and natural,
- you will regain peace of mind and your zest for life once the anxiety, stress and irritability caused by giving up smoking fades away,
- you will save money,
- your skin, hair, teeth, and fingers will look healthier and your breath will be fresher,
- as the number of 'no smoking' areas continues to grow, you will regain your place in society. On a more practical level, this means it will become increasingly easy to resist the temptation to take up smoking again.

**More information** on WHP is available at <http://osha.europa.eu/en/topics/whp>

**More information** on workplace health promotion in Ireland, Malta and the UK is available at:

<http://www.ohsa.org.mt/>  
<http://www.workingforhealth.gov.uk/>  
<http://www.workingforhealthni.gov.uk/>  
<http://www.workplacehealth.ie/>

<sup>(\*)</sup> <http://uk-en.help-eu.com/pages/My-reasons-to-quit-raisons-2-2.html>

**European Agency for Safety and Health at Work**

Gran Vía, 33, 48009 Bilbao, SPAIN  
 Tel. +34 944794360, Fax +34 944794383  
 E-mail: [information@osha.europa.eu](mailto:information@osha.europa.eu)

© European Agency for Safety and Health at Work. Reproduction is authorised provided the source is acknowledged. Printed in Belgium, 2010

