



# Wellness at Work

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## School District Pays Employees for Each Pound They Lose

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The Washoe County School District in Nevada estimated that in a single year, it spent \$300,000 on direct costs associated with obesity and \$1 million for gastric bypass surgeries. It instituted a weight loss program that paid employees \$10 per pound lost, up to 25 pounds. Program participants missed three fewer workdays per year, and produced a cost savings of \$15.60 per dollar spent on the program.

This was only one of the innovative programs introduced by the Washoe County School District since 1997. The organization has a self-funded health insurance program and they keep track of how their healthcare money is being spent. They noticed that their health claims were rising due to preventable conditions. They decided to provide opportunities for employees to reduce their health risks and gave them incentives to participate in the programs. Currently, they have nearly 4,000 employees and about 92% participate in the wellness program.

## Extra Weight = Extra Health Problems

*By Dr. Don Hall*

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*“Much of the excess mortality due to obesity was the result of increased high blood pressure, high blood lipids, and diabetes among the obese women.”*

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The Women’s Health Initiative (WHI) study reported on the risk of obesity to health. This study has created controversy on the role of overweight to health risks. The study included more than 90,000 women followed for 7 years. The researchers reported that obesity, but not overweight, was linked to increased risk of death from all causes.

Some have suggested that being overweight may even have a health advantage. A closer look at the data, however, helps explain this apparent paradox. It’s long been known that being a little overweight may provide a small health advantage among older women (age 70-80+). This study included nearly 22,000 women aged 70 or older. This group would be expected to have the highest mortality, so when all ages are included, they found that overweight (BMI 25-29.9) showed no increase in mortality rates.

Please see *Extra Weight* on page 3

*“The bottom line is that if you want to improve your survivability odds, you will do remarkably better (live longer) if you stay in the high fit group.”*

## Staying Fit for Life

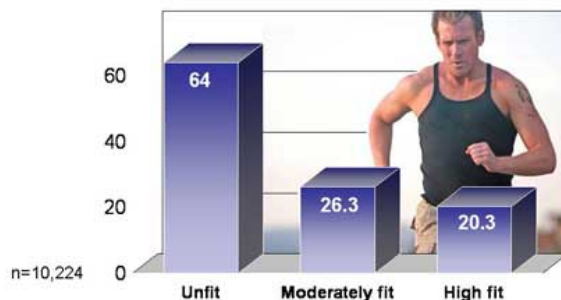
By Dr. Thomas W. Kramer

Employees and employers spend hours each year going over details of their insurance plans. Everyone wants the best health care coverage for their money. Recent studies show that the best health insurance investment is in keeping yourself fit. The Journal of the American Medical Association did a report on rates of illness and death based on people’s level of fitness. They divided a large number of people into 3 groups: unfit, moderately fit, and high fit. The graphs below show the mortality rates of those groups as they were tracked over time. One could reasonable conclude that illness rates also followed a similar pattern.

### Moderate Activity & Health

#### Mortality Rate – Men

per 10,000 person years, all causes



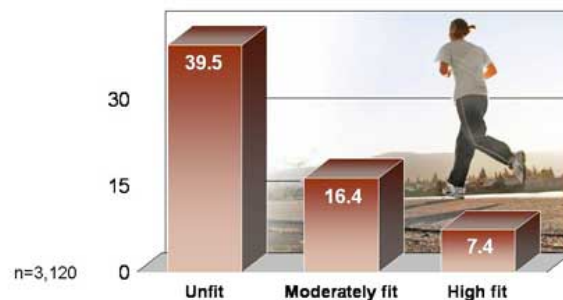
Source: Journal of the American Medical Association, November 3, 1989.

1 © 2006 Wellsource, Inc.

### Moderate Activity & Health

#### Mortality Rate – Women

per 10,000 person years, all causes



Source: Journal of the American Medical Association, November 3, 1989.

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The biggest drop in mortality was between those in the unfit to moderately fit, showing that even moderate exercise done regularly had a strong protective effect on health.

The bottom line is that if you want to improve your survivability odds, you will do remarkably better (live longer) if you stay in the high fit group.

**Points to Remember:** First, regular exercise decreases your health risks and helps prevent life-threatening illnesses. Second, even moderate fitness dramatically improves your overall health. Third, the healthier you are, the less you’ll spend on healthcare. Over time that can amount to thousands of dollars in reduced premiums, deductibles, and co-payments.

## Starting a Company Wellness Program

Many companies are faced with healthcare cost increases of 15% or more per year. In most cases, insurance premium rates are based on the health claims of the employee group. Leading companies throughout the country are getting a grip on their healthcare costs by starting wellness programs with their employees.

A wellness program that is well organized generally has a 5 to 1 return on investment, and can be implemented with very little disturbance in a company's workflow. Here are 4 major ingredients to a successful wellness program.

- \* Get support from senior management for the wellness program
- \* Collect data on the company and employees to set a baseline
- \* Based on the data, set an action plan to reduce health risks and cost
- \* Evaluate the success of your activities and change course as needed

Today, wellness programs are an important part of strategic planning. As healthcare costs eat up company profits, companies need to aggressively plan their financial defense.

### *Extra Weight* from page 1

When you look at each age group, however, overweight women in the 50-59 and 60-69 age groups both showed increased mortality rates compared to women in the healthy weight (BMI <25) range. Only the women over 70 showed a lower mortality in the overweight (BMI 25-29.9) group. All age groups showed increased mortality rates in the obese (BMI 30+) group.

Obese women (BMI 30+) were twice as likely to die from coronary heart disease as women in the healthy weight range (BMI <25). Obesity more than doubled the risk for hypertension, and increased the risk of diabetes by 4-10 times. Overall, obesity increased the risk of death from any cause by 30-60% in the moderately obese women, and increased mortality rates by 2-3 times in the very obese (BMI 35-40+).

Much of the excess mortality due to obesity was the result of increased high blood pressure, high blood lipids, and diabetes among the obese women.

**The bottom line is this.** Overweight carries a moderate health risk for women younger than 70, but the major increase in mortality is for women in the obese range, especially those with a BMI of 35-40 or higher.

Reference: McTigue K et al. Mortality and Cardiac and Vascular Outcomes in Extremely Obese Women. *Journal of the American Medical Association*. 2006;296:79-86. July 5, 2006.

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*“A wellness program that is well organized generally has a 5 to 1 return on investment . . . “*

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*Maintaining proper body weight has tremendous health benefits.*

For More Information on company wellness programs, contact **Healthsync** to find out about special education programs and seminars

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