

Reducing Type 2 Diabetes in the Workplace

It's estimated that about five hundred million people worldwide will have diabetes in 2030. About 90-95 per cent of all diabetes cases are type 2. *The good news?* Many cases of type 2 diabetes can be prevented, with proper diet, exercise and a resolve to live healthier.

There's a good chance that many of your employees are at risk of developing type 2 diabetes, and some may already suffer from the disease. Fortunately, as a people leader, you're in a great position to have a positive influence on the health of your team and to minimize the impact of type 2 diabetes on your workforce by educating your employees and making it easier for them to lead healthier lifestyles.

Understanding Type 2 Diabetes

When your body is under stress, both physically and mentally, it looks for extra energy to fight off the sense of danger. The body sends out stress hormones, which include adrenalin and cortisol. These raise the blood sugar levels, which in turn increase your energy levels. As the threat of danger disappears, the body uses insulin, created by the pancreas, to bring the blood sugar levels back to normal.

What is type 2 diabetes?

The difference between a healthy body and one with type 2 diabetes is that the diabetic one doesn't create enough insulin to respond to the high levels of blood sugar. This means that it is harder for a diabetic person to keep their blood sugar levels steady.

What are the risk factors?

One of the key risk factors for type 2 diabetes is obesity, which is related to diet, exercise and overall lifestyle. With long hours of sitting at a workstation, office employees are especially likely to become overweight. Even losing a mere 10-15 pounds can have a significant impact in reducing the chances of getting diabetes. Other risk factors include age, ethnicity and a family history of the disease.

Type 2 Diabetes in the Workplace

The success of your team hinges on each member putting in their full effort. If your team members aren't leading healthy lifestyles, they're more likely to miss work, accomplish fewer tasks and ultimately cost the organization money. Here are just a few of the many ways diabetes can negatively impact your team:

Missed work days. Overall, diabetes is responsible for 15 million missed work days every year. An employee suffering from the disease may need to take more sick days for health complications and more frequent medical checkups. And since team members rarely work in isolation, when one key member is unexpectedly off work, it can delay projects and ultimately prevent the team from achieving its goals.

Reduced productivity. Diabetes can lower a person's energy level, cause anxiety and distraction. An employee with type 2 diabetes may also require extra time to take medicine, eat snacks and monitor blood sugar levels.

Rising insurance costs. Diabetes costs the United States almost \$174 billion yearly because medical expenses are 2.3 times more than those not affected by the disease. As the number of employees diagnosed with type 2 diabetes rises, the number of claims to your company health insurance policy may increase as well. This can lead to everyone paying higher premiums. Employees may not get the medical help they need because it is not covered under their benefits plan, and as a result, their health may get worse. This can ultimately affect their ability to work to their full potential.

Promoting a Healthier Workplace

As any good leader knows, the first step to success is to start with a proper plan. Here are some strategies to help you help your team members lead healthier lifestyles in the workplace and beyond:

Activate activity. Look for easy, low-cost solutions to help employees get moving. For example, you might set-up stretch breaks throughout the day or encourage a group walk during break times. You may also organize an employee sports team or look into group discount options at a local gym.

Have it healthy. With long hours and high stress, many workers will neglect a healthy diet. They may choose the convenience of unhealthy fast foods over more nutritious options. But healthy eating doesn't have to be difficult, tasteless or time-consuming. If your workplace has a cafeteria or vending machine, advocate for healthier options.

Check on checkups. Offer information about local screening tests for diabetes. Check online to easily find locations.

Spot signs of trouble. As a people leader, it's important to take care of those working under you. Learn to recognize the signs of trouble for someone who has type 2 diabetes. If a staff member with diabetes seems confused, disoriented, has lost consciousness or appears to be having a seizure, call 9-1-1 right away.

Inform to reform. Consider scheduling an on-site session hosted by a health professional (e.g. a nutritionist or dietician) who can provide more information about diabetes; the signs, risks, and changes to eating and lifestyle that employees and their families can make right now to lower the risks. Explain how it can affect their overall health and their work.

Though type 2 diabetes is on the rise, you can help minimize its impact on your team by making a plan of action, providing relevant information and creating an environment that encourages a positive, healthy lifestyle. Lead the way and others are sure to follow!

Did you know?

- Diabetes reduces the ability to work by 4.4 percent for women and 7.1 percent for males.
- Moderate exercise can reduce the possibility of getting diabetes by 58-71 percent.
- The Center for Disease Control predicts that the number of diabetics may triple by 2050.

Looking for additional support? Your Employee Assistance and Work/Life Program can help through a variety of resources. Call your Employee Assistance and Work/Life Program at 1 866 468-9461. Visit shepellfgi.com.

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