

An Effective Workplace Wellness Program in Arkansas

May 15, 2010 [Juan Ramos](#)



Wellness Interventions Improve Employee Health - *Phillie Casablanca*

The Healthy Employee Lifestyle Program (HELP) is a feasible and affordable workplace intervention that may be easily implemented in different worksites.

A web-based worksite wellness program implemented by the Arkansas Department of Health in 2005-2006 proved to be feasible and affordable and may be easily implemented in other settings. The one-year workplace initiative, Healthy Employee Lifestyle Program (HELP), nearly doubled fruit and vegetable intake among state health employees.

A [study](#) about the HELP intervention appears in the journal *Preventing Chronic Disease*. The Arkansas Department of Health developed the program in collaboration with the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) using resources provided in the [Guide to Community Preventive Services](#).

"Increased fruit and vegetable consumption is an easily communicated health message that shows promise for decreasing risk for chronic disease," according to the study.

Encouraging Healthy Behavior Change Using Web-based Tools

The HELP pilot intervention encouraged behavior change through three main approaches:

1. Providing an overall wellness report with tips for improving health.
2. Rewarding health behaviors with points redeemable for incentives.
3. Providing education and peer support.

The program used web-based technology and site-specific tailoring to decrease risk for chronic diseases and reduce health care costs. Employees completed a health risk assessment before the beginning of the program and one year after starting the program to assess diet and physical activity, other health risk factors and readiness to make behavioral changes.

Participating employees were encouraged to eat healthfully, engage in regular exercise, report health behaviors using a web-based reporting system, accumulate points for healthy behaviors and redeem points for incentives. They could record their activities daily, weekly or monthly.

Employees reported their progress through the web-based system and earned points for self-reported fruit and vegetable consumption, physical activity, smoking cessation, and completion of health screenings, weight management and health risk assessments. They could redeem earned points for rewards such as t-shirts, water bottles and up to three days of paid leave.

HELP Resulted in Employees Eating a Healthier Diet

At the one-year follow-up assessment, 26.2% of participants ate three or more servings of vegetables per day, compared to 13.6% at the beginning of the pilot. Consumption of three or more fruits per day increased from 10.8% to 17.3%.

Consumption of the more healthful proteins, grains and dairy increased slightly. The assessment also suggested that participants' readiness to make behavioral changes—such as eating up to five or more fruits and vegetables per day and eating a diet low in fat—improved.

The HELP pilot program produced positive outcomes in a brief period and demonstrated potential for improving dietary behaviors of working adults, the study concluded.

Reference:

1. Philyaw Perez A, Phillips MM, Cornell CE, et al. Promoting dietary change among state health employees in Arkansas through a worksite wellness program: The Healthy Employee Lifestyle Program (HELP). *Prev Chronic Dis* 2009; 6(4): A123.