



## Offering information to employees about healthy, active living

Getting quality information about healthy, active living into the hands of Albertans can be a challenge, but employers can play an active role by offering practical and helpful information to their employees in a variety of ways.

### Meetings and messages

Employers are in a great position to offer clear messages and information on a range of active living topics. This information should be targeted to all employees equally and, ideally, should address issues or topics that are chosen by employees.

Employers can support their employees by offering handouts, information sessions, news items and more, and information can be shared in person, on posters and electronically.

One way for employers to demonstrate both their interest and leadership is to inform all employees that they're willing to host information sessions on healthy behaviours or other active living topics.

Make sure you schedule sessions or meetings at a time that's convenient to the greatest number of employees such as during lunch hour or at a time set well in advance so people can plan their work accordingly.

Depending on employee input, staff work schedules and the number and types of employees, sessions or meetings can be held weekly, monthly or at variable times to maximize employee involvement. Some topics or themes might require only one meeting and could be addressed at a quarterly or yearly gathering, possibly in conjunction with other established events—an employee barbecue, for example, or a scheduled business or planning meeting.

### Involve employees and listen to them

To generate maximum employee buy-in, make sure you find out what healthy, active living topics currently interest your employees. For example, you could ask your employees the following questions to find out what they're interested in:

- Would you like to see a yoga class at your worksite during lunch hour?
- Do you want to learn about good sources for healthy eating recipes?
- Are you concerned about diabetes prevention?
- Do you have any interest in a daily or weekly walking group for staff?

Small employers can call a meeting or ask individual employees what kinds of topics or information would be of interest. Larger employers can hold departmental meetings or conduct internal surveys to determine topics of interest.

### Bring in outside experts

Employers don't have to be physical activity experts—external experts can be invited to speak to employees on a variety of health topics. For example, you could invite an outside speaker to talk about such issues as:

- the impacts of work and life stress on health;
- the importance of getting sufficient sleep to promote overall health;
- healthy lunches at work (or healthy meals and eating throughout the day);
- the health benefits of regular physical activity;
- weight management and obesity prevention; and
- diabetes prevention and management.

Hosting and supporting these types of informational events can be a productive and cost-effective way to spread active living messages to employees and encourage individual steps towards increased physical activity.

When it comes to topics on healthy eating, employers can access resources and contacts from the Dietitians of Canada. For instance, employers can contact one or more professional dietitians in their region, and invite them to speak to employees on selected topics.

In some cases, employers may also be able to draw upon the expertise of internal experts who have the qualifications or experience to lead an information session or activity themselves. For example, some employees may have a credential as a fitness leader, yoga instructor or pilates instructor. Making use of these skills and attributes can help build fellowship among your employees.

### Diversity factor

It may not be possible for employers to address all of the topics or ideas that interest their diverse employee groups.

One alternative is to provide support for employees to attend outside seminars that are offered to the public. This might involve giving the employee time off, such as an extended

lunch hour, or allowing them to use time in lieu (additional hours worked) to attend an evening workshop. Employers might also consider paying for some or all of the attendance fee, whether directly or through an education or training element of an existing employee benefits plan.

## Following through

After inviting employee input and involvement in promoting active living topics at work, employers should be prepared to work with employees, staff associations and unions to respond to requests for active living information or measures in the workplace.

Employers must recognize that if they're going to arm their employees with healthy lifestyle information, they should be ready to show their willingness to support healthy, active living by "walking the talk."

- Support physical activity by providing bike racks, fitness rooms and shower and locker facilities at work.
- Support activities and classes by making work or other spaces available. For example, a lunch-hour yoga class could be held in a regular meeting room.
- Facilitate healthy eating by providing fridges, microwaves and basic kitchens at the workplace.

## Providing information and supporting physical activity

By providing quality active living information to employees and creating opportunities for employees to be active during the workday, employers can do their part to lead more employees towards active lifestyles and to realize positive health benefits.

Remember, employers don't have to be experts on the topics—they need only be willing to facilitate the sharing of information among employees. Together, employers and employees can create a "win-win" workplace.

## Learn more

[Dietitians of Canada—Find a Dietitian](#)

Find an expert in your region and invite them to address your employees.

[Canadian Fitness and Lifestyle Research Institute](#)

Several bulletins on different topics based on surveys of Canadian companies.

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