

National Nutrition Month – How to be *100% Fad Free*

Obesity has not only reached epidemic proportions in the United States, it has become a worldwide problem. The World Health Organization reports that more than one billion adults are overweight and at least 300 million of those are clinically obese.¹ The Centers for Disease Control (CDC) has estimated that in the United States alone, approximately 65% of adults age 20 and over are either overweight or obese² and there is a good chance that many of these are your employees. What you may not realize is that these employees are costing you money.

Individuals who are overweight or obese are more likely to develop serious health issues such as diabetes, coronary heart disease, stroke and some forms of cancer. The more overweight an individual is, the better the chance they will develop some type of health problem. Studies have shown that obese employees take more sick leave than their non-obese counterparts and are twice as likely to experience high levels of absenteeism. It has been estimated that obesity related disorders cost employers 39 million lost workdays per year at a total cost of \$13 billion dollars.³

As an employer, there are steps you can take to help reverse this trend. One of the easiest ways is to help educate your employees on the importance of a healthy diet and regular exercise. Each year, the American Dietetic Association (ADA) sponsors National Nutrition Month, an educational campaign designed to focus attention on the importance of making informed food choices and developing sound eating and exercise habits. While the ADA concentrates its activities in March, their suggestions and programs can be implemented year round. This year's theme is helping people become *100% Fad Free* when it comes to diet and weight loss. "You can lose weight on virtually any diet," according to ADA spokesperson Roberta Anding, "if you eat less, you will lose weight. The question is can you maintain a healthy lifestyle over the long term."⁴

According to the ADA, most people are looking for a "quick fix" when it comes to diet and weight loss. The diet industry has become big business and the market is flooded with many new diets and weight loss products that guarantee results in a short period of time. Unfortunately, most do not work as promised. ADA spokesperson Dee Sandquist explains; "The reality is that no super food or diet approach can reverse weight gain resulting from overeating and inactivity. And because most fad diets don't teach new eating habits and may require you to give up your favorite foods, people usually don't stick to them."⁵

TIPS FOR EVALUATING FAD DIETS

- If it sounds too good to be true, it is, especially if the diet or product offers a "quick fix".
- Avoid products offering a guaranteed cure or which promote "limited time offers".
- Watch out for products that describe certain foods as "good" or "bad".
- Is the source of the information also trying to sell a product, such as supplements?
- Avoid any diets that require eliminating certain foods or entire food groups.

Source: Dee Sandquist, ADA spokesperson

By educating your employees on the importance of eating a healthy and balanced diet as well as encouraging regular physical activity, you will not only improve their health, but your bottom line as well. Here are a few suggestions to get your started:

- Sponsor a nutrition fair to help educate your employees as to the importance of a sensible, nutritious diet.
- Require your vendors to offer healthy food choices.
- Provide nutritional information on all food offered in your cafeteria or vending machines to allow people to make educated choices.
- Lead by example; consider eliminating food during meetings, presentations and seminars.⁶
- Offer on-site classes related to weight loss, nutrition and exercise.
- Promote exercise in the workplace – if possible, provide safe walkways for your employees, encourage the use of stairs over the elevator or sponsor a fun run/walk.

Creating a healthy and active workforce not only makes good sense, but also makes good “cents” for you as well.

For more information on National Nutrition Month, visit the American Dietetic Association at <http://www.eatright.com>.

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