

Workplace lifestyle intervention program improves health, reduces diabetes and heart disease risks

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A healthy lifestyle intervention program administered at the workplace and developed by the University of Pittsburgh Graduate School of Public Health significantly reduces risk factors for diabetes and heart disease, according to a study reported in the March issue of the *Journal of Occupational and Environmental Medicine*.

The program was well-received by participants at Bayer Corp., who lost weight and increased the amount of physical activity they got each day, when compared with a control group in the study, which was funded by the National Institutes of Health.

"Health care expenditures associated with [diabetes](#) are spiraling, causing widespread concern, particularly for employers who worry about employee health and productivity," said lead author M. Kaye Kramer, Dr.P.H., assistant professor in Pitt Public Health's Department of Epidemiology and director of the school's Diabetes Prevention Support Center. "This leads to an interest in workplace health promotion; however, there are very few evidence-based programs that actually demonstrate improvement in employee health. This study found that our program not only improves health, but also that employees really like it."

This demonstration program is based on the U.S. Diabetes Prevention Program (DPP), a national study that found people at risk for diabetes who lost a modest amount of weight through diet and exercise sharply reduced their chances of developing diabetes, outperforming people who took a diabetes drug instead.

Dr. Kramer and colleagues built on the DPP to create a group-based program that puts the findings into practice, called Group Lifestyle

Balance. The program is divided into 22 sessions over a one-year period and aimed at helping people make [lifestyle](#) changes to improve health. The sessions can be done as a group with a lifestyle coach or through a DVD coupled with brief weekly phone or, in certain cases, email consultations with the lifestyle coach. The option of the DVD with [lifestyle coach](#) support not only served as the main intervention option for those employees who traveled or who did not want to participate in the program in a group venue but also offered a valuable replacement for employees who chose to participate via group setting but had to miss an occasional session.

"Our Group Lifestyle Balance program has proven successful in diverse community settings, so we adapted it for the workplace since we found that there was a real need for effective programs that could fit into people's work lives," said senior author Andrea Kriska, Ph.D., professor in Pitt Public Health's Department of Epidemiology and principal investigator of the study. "This current effort in the worksite shows clearly that a proven [healthy lifestyle](#) program, like the Group Lifestyle Balance program, offered to people where they work is not only feasible but effective in reducing risk factors for diabetes and [heart disease](#) for participating employees."

A total of 89 employees at Bayer Corp. in Robinson Township, Pa., who were at risk for diabetes or heart disease were enrolled in the demonstration program in the fall of 2010 and followed for 18 months.

Over the course of a year, participants lost an average of 5 percent of their body weight (10 pounds), shrunk their waistlines by about 2 inches and brought down the levels of fat and sugar in their blood - all measures that reduce the risk of

heart disease and diabetes. They also increased their [physical activity](#) by almost twofold.

Of the participants, 96 percent said they felt it was beneficial to offer the program at the worksite, and 99 percent said they would recommend it to their co-workers.

"The positive results that employees experienced from this lifestyle program speak to the benefits of personalized health programs in the workplace," said Phil Franklin, M.D., U.S. corporate medical director, Bayer Corp. "I would like to congratulate the University of Pittsburgh researchers on the study."

Provided by University of Pittsburgh Schools of the Health Sciences

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