

HELPING EMPLOYEES QUIT SMOKING

Offering assistance to employees who would like to stop smoking benefits both employers and employees alike. For employees, the benefits are profound because most smokers would like to quit, and smoking cessation can significantly improve health and quality of life. For employers, the benefits include reducing the high costs of absenteeism, medical care, lost productivity, and cleaning and maintenance related to smoking. Reduced smoking rates among employees can also improve your company's image and employee morale.

Smoking cessation initiatives can be especially important and cost-effective if implemented one to three months in advance of a smokefree workplace policy. This will allow the cessation program to help employees who would like to quit smoking ahead of the policy and will give the program a chance to mature before demand increases in response to the smokefree policy. Workplace smoking cessation initiatives are also affordable. They are widely regarded as the "gold standard" of health-care cost-effectiveness.

Due to the wide variation in health care systems and employer practices among countries, no single approach to helping employees quit will work everywhere. The following helpful guidelines, however, can be adapted to the size and culture of your company. These include:

Rely on an interdepartmental working group to develop and oversee smoking cessation assistance. For ease of coordination, the same working group that is overseeing implementation of the smokefree workplace policy could also be asked to oversee development or enhancement of smoking cessation assistance offered by your company. Activities of the working group should include:

- Assessing the current cost of smoking to your company and the potential benefits that could be achieved through a smoking cessation initiative
- Using surveys and/or focus groups to assess the level of interest among employees in smoking cessation products and services
- Researching available resources
- Deciding on an approach and making appropriate recommendations to management

Determine the level of support to provide. Your company can provide smoking cessation programs and support ranging from “comprehensive” to “facilitative” to “referral-based,” as described below:

- Comprehensive: Fully-funded benefits are provided on-site.
- Facilitative: The employer provides extensive information, including self-help materials, and makes some cessation services available.
- Referral-based: Employers refer employees to community-based programs and materials.

Integrate smoking cessation assistance into your company’s other health and wellness programs. Occupational health and wellness staff involved in stress management, nutrition and physical activity, health screenings, and other programs offered by your company should be trained to assess, educate, and refer smokers to appropriate cessation information and programs as part of their work. The diagram labeled “Sample Workplace Health and Wellness Program” shows how smoking cessation fits into other programs.

Evaluate the success of the cessation assistance offered. Your company should evaluate both short-term benefits of the cessation assistance, such as enhanced employee awareness, improved morale, higher quality of work, increased job satisfaction, and long-term outcomes such as:

- Increased productivity
- Reduced employee absenteeism
- Prevention of injuries
- Reduced risk of fire damage
- Increased employee retention
- Enhanced opportunities for corporate social responsibility

Consider coordinating the collection of this information with the evaluation of the smokefree workplace policy.



Choose appropriate smoking cessation resources. Cost-effective smoking cessation products and services that your company could consider offering as part of a cessation program include:

- Individual cessation counseling
- Group counseling
- Telephone counseling
- Informational and self-help materials
- Smoking cessation medications, including nicotine replacement therapy (NRT)
- Referrals to cessation programs and information in the community

All of these approaches to cessation are effective when properly implemented; some smokers are more easily motivated by one approach than another. Studies have shown that cessation medications provide much better results when paired with counseling, so ideally your company would provide employees with access to both.

The following publications provide more detailed information about how your company can help employees quit smoking and about smoking cessation products and services:

Employers' Smoking Cessation Guide: Practical Approaches to a Costly Workplace Problem, 2nd Edition
Professional Assisted Cessation Therapy 2002
<http://www.endsmoking.org/resources/employersguide/pdf/employersguide-2nd-edition.pdf>

Policy recommendations on smoking cessation and treatment of tobacco dependence World Health Organization (WHO) 2003
http://www.who.int/tobacco/resources/publications/en/intro_chapter3.pdf

Tobacco in the Workplace: Meeting the Challenge. A handbook for employers.
WHO Copenhagen 2002
<http://www.euro.who.int/document/e74819.pdf>

1 Eddy DM. Eddy ranks the tests. Harvard Health Letter. 1992; (July Suppl): 10-11.