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August 2009

The Mansfield Athletic Club Wellness Newsletter

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## corporate health

### Getting paid to get on that treadmill

Some companies find that healthy workers are better for the bottom line

By Eve Tahmincioglu  
Contributor, msnbc.com

Given the economic downturn and accompanying layoffs over the past year, you might think company wellness programs would be going the way of the matching 401(k). Not so.

In fact, many companies that have tried to trim their workers' waistlines, and health care costs, may find themselves in a better position than ever to give workers a little nudge.

"The rising cost of medical care is unsustainable and is a huge and legitimate concern to employers that pay for it," says labor attorney Hanan Kolko. "During the past decade or so, health care costs have been rising at three times the rate of inflation. Every nickel that goes to pay for rising medical costs can't pay for raises, pensions or 401(k) matches."

The median health care expense per employee last year was \$7,173, according to a recent survey by Watson Wyatt and the National Business Group on Health.

But companies save from \$1.49 to \$4.91 in health-related expenses for every dollar spent on wellness programs, according to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

That may be part of the reason why, despite the downturn, employers don't seem to be skimping on their health and wellness initiatives.

A survey of about 500 human resources and benefit executives by professional services firm Towers Perrin found:

- 50 percent of companies have or will introduce or increase investments in wellness and health promotion in 2009 and 2010.
- 32 percent have or will introduce or increase financial incentives, such as bonuses or premium discounts, for wellness or health promotion activities in 2009 and 2010. Another 30 percent are considering this action.
- 45 percent say they are considering introducing or increasing penalties for nonparticipation in wellness or health promotion activities.

This is an opportune time for employers to focus on wellness, says Dave Guilmette, managing director of the Towers Perrin Health and Welfare practice. Employees,

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he says, are going to think: "If I want to keep my job, I better pay attention to what my employer is asking me to do."

**Treadmills in the office**

Financial services firm USAA has been running a wellness program for five years.

"We think 50 to 80 percent of our medical costs are related to people who are overweight," says Dr. Peter Wald, enterprise medical director for the firm, which has 20,000 employees.

While the San Antonio, Texas-based firm saw some improvements thanks to the wellness programs, the company had little success actually getting people to lose weight, Wald says.

Previously, workers received a lump sum of money just for participating, but now the company is tying incentives to actual weight loss. Employees have a year to lose 10 percent of their body weight. If they can pull it off, they'll get \$300.

At AstraZeneca US, saving money on medical costs and improving worker productivity are among the key reasons for a continued focus on promoting employee health.

Despite expected layoffs of 15,000 globally through 2013, the pharmaceutical firm has, for the most part, not allowed their wellness efforts to wane.

Due to economic issues, the company did end financial incentives for participation. However, AstraZeneca added a new program to encourage workers to ride their bikes to work every Friday. They also now offer a free two-week trial membership to the fitness center and encourage managers to lead by example by adopting healthy behaviors such as eating right and exercising.

"We know people are more pressured for time," says Dr. Joe Henry, executive director of US Safety, Health and Environment for the Wilmington, Del.-based company. "If we are going to ask people to work harder and longer hours, we have to give them something."

So AstraZeneca is making it easier for employees to exercise by scheduling morning meetings later — so workers can hit the gym — and also implementing 'walk stations' that allow employees to walk at a slow pace on a treadmill while working or in a meeting.

Ministry Health Care in Milwaukee is hoping financial incentives do the trick.

The hospital and clinic network has seen a cost increase of about 8 percent in its 2008 health insurance premiums and expects a 12 percent rise this year.

But Michael Knitter, director of total rewards at Ministry, is hoping to shave up to 4 percent off costs thanks to a rewards-based weight management program the company implemented last year.

Workers who take part in the program will get \$5 every quarter and \$5 for every 1 percent of weight loss up to 10 percent per quarter, he says. Also, by participating in the program and agreeing to a blood draw and testing, they can take \$240 annually off their premiums.

Cathy Young, a 50-year-old Ministry employee, signed up because she wanted to lose 20 pounds.

"I'm one of those people that when I'm stressed, I eat," she says. She credits the program with helping her stay on track.

"They give you e-mail reminders every single day to do things like get up and walk around, or grab a glass of water rather than soda," she explains. "It's been a big help."

So far, Knitter says, the program has been successful with a 40 percent participation rate.

But during the latter part of 2008, the hospital saw an actual increase in weight gain among workers because of stress related to the bad economy. "That quarter was when the economy was tanking and people were losing money in their 403(b)s and 401(k)s," he says. "Now we seem to be on track."

**Stressed-out employees**

The recession has caused a lot of stress for workers, and some have seen their healthy habits go right out the window as a result. A recent survey from ZoneDiet.com found that 25 percent of Americans are turning to comfort food more because of the economy.

"Along with emotional eating, I am finding alcohol intake has increased considerably," says Stephanie Middleberg, a New York dietitian. Many of her clients that used to have healthy food options at work, thanks to their employers, have seen most of those disappear.

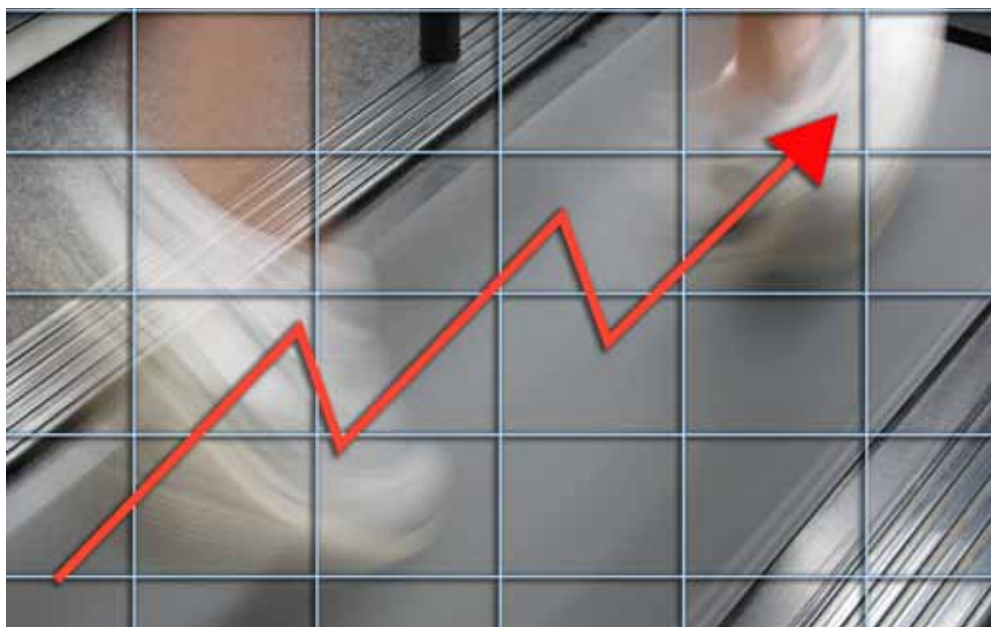
Some workers whose companies offer few programs or incentives are taking matters into her own hands.

Judy Podvin, 45, a residential real estate agent from Howell, Mich., has gained about 10 pounds in the last year and says it's partly due to the economic collapse that has hit Michigan hard.

"No one has any money, people are losing their homes, and half the deals don't make it to the table even after months of work," she explains. "It's so depressing and stressful. You go home and feel sorry for yourself and wait for the next meal."

She's trying to eat better and has hired personal trainer Lori Wengle.

"I've only gone down 10 pounds and a size and a half, but I feel a million times better," she explains. "It's absolutely helped my jobs performance."



## Fewer calories equals a longer life...

### At least in monkeys

By Denise Mann

Cutting daily calorie intake by 30 percent may put the brakes on the aging process, have beneficial effects on the brain, and result in a longer life span, according to a new 20-year study of monkeys published in the journal *Science*.

Calorie restriction needs to be done carefully in order not to turn into malnutrition, say experts.

The study confirms in primates what's long been known in other species, including mice, worms, and flies. And it's no surprise to the humans who have taken the animal research to heart and adopted calorie restriction as a means to a (hopefully) longer and healthier life.

Brian M. Delaney has been eating 20 percent fewer calories than most people of his size and stature since 1992. "The new

study confirms everything we have seen," says Delaney, coauthor of "The Longevity Diet" and president of the nonprofit Calorie Restriction Society, which had 2,000 members in 2007 and thousands more on mailing lists. "It also adds some new information on brain volume changes."

In the study of 76 adult rhesus monkeys (a species that shares many similarities with humans), only 13 percent of the calorie-restricted animals died during the 20-year period, compared with 37 percent of monkeys allowed to eat their usual diet. (The study began with 30 monkeys; an additional 46 were added in 1994.)

At the start of the study, the researchers analyzed how much the monkeys were eating and then cut the calories by 10 percent each month for three months in the calorie-restricted group. The other monkeys were allowed to eat as much as they wanted.

The calorie-restricted monkeys preserved volume in areas of their brain that have

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**Q.** Hello. I started getting back into shape in January by running four to five times a week and after having spoken with some of my new running buddies, I decided to purchase a heart rate monitor. What are the main recommendations to get the most out of this tool? I have heard about several approaches

René, Montréal



**A.** Congratulations on getting back into shape and on the interest you have shown in getting the right information to achieve your goal.

You will not be surprised to hear that scientists and trainers are constantly trying

to find the best training approaches for our favourite activities. Sometimes, certain beliefs persist and become outdated, or bad methods continue to affect an activity and can adversely affect the "lasting" development of the athlete or of the person using such methods. Simply putting on a heart rate monitor won't ensure that we'll know what to do with the heart rate (HR) displayed on the monitor. And, too often, the notions of equating predictions (the most common of which is  $220 - \text{age} \times \%$ ), to predict the intensity of training sessions, are hardly better.

For a very long time, the athletic and training communities have applied a simple and effective method to be able to control intensity levels during a training session or even during a run. Heart rates are recognized as your body's measurable physiological response to physical exertion. This comes from the fact that a direct and linear relationship exists between HR and the consumption of oxygen. Although this is a valid piece of information, there are certain problematic zones, one being the fact

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## The magic of now

I went for a bike ride on Sunday morning. Alone. A simple word, really, that triggers emotions both bizarre and gradiose for a father of two young children. Not that I don't appreciate the time I spend running after my kids, but sometimes it's nice to spend just a few minutes alone and reconnect with basic sensations.

Clear my head, think of absolutely nothing at all, simply feel. Feel the resistance from the pedals as they produce movement. The wind in my face and the sound it makes while it blows through the trees. My body heat rising while the incline steepens. The muscles working just below the surface of my skin. I choose to ignore the huffing and puffing of the cyclist who does not take his bike out very often, and the careless driver who almost sends me flying into a ditch. Let's just say that the quality of the moment distracts me from the little annoyances that horn their way into my Sunday-morning ride.

While I cover more and more distance, the simple joy of physical activity becomes increasingly present. The local neurologist would explain to me that it's only the endorphins being released by my brain that transport me to this state of euphoria, but I prefer to attribute this joyous state to the calm, to the movement, and to those few minutes of reflection: it sounds so much more poetic!

Everyday life, at least the professional side of things, normally delivers a sense of accomplishment and pride. However, professional life also comes with its share of stress, often intractable-appearing problems, and long hours spent at the office.

It's when I compare the hecticness of daily life with the feelings experienced on my Sunday-morning bike ride that I become fully aware of the benefits of physical activity. Forget normal weight, waist size, increased cardiovascular capacity, muscular endurance, and blood pressure. The improvement in all these aspects of health is only the simple by-product of something much more important: feeling good.

With the information overload we find ourselves in, we try too often to pigeonhole

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been linked to motor control, memory, and problem-solving.

“The new study shows the effects of calorie restriction in primates that are closely related to humans,” says lead researcher Ricki Colman, Ph.D., an associate scientist at the Wisconsin National Primate Research Center, in Madison. “Monkeys in the calorie-restricted group are more likely to live healthier, longer.” The oldest monkey in the study is now 29. This species has an average lifespan of 27 when in captivity.

“We don’t know about ultimate longevity yet, but the monkeys in the calorie-restricted group are unencumbered by age-related diseases and brain atrophy, which is linked to cognitive ability,” says Colman.

Monkeys in both groups consumed very healthful diets. “We are studying calorie restriction, not malnutrition,” stresses Colman, who does not follow this type of diet herself. The study diet included 15 percent protein and 10 percent fat and was enriched with vitamins.

As an advocate of calorie-restricted diets, Delaney says he isn’t starving, despite his low-calorie lifestyle.

He eats a hearty breakfast including a large bowl of low-fat granola and fruit, soy milk, nonfat yogurt, and a cup of coffee. Delaney admits his 900-or-so-calorie breakfast is more than most people consume in the morning, but he then skips lunch, works an eight- or nine-hour day, and eats a high-fiber, vegetarian dinner, keeping his total intake under 2,000 calories a day. (An average adult male consumes 2,618 calories a day, according to statistics from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.)

As a result, Delaney may live a longer and healthier life than his peers who consume more calories. Studies in mice, worms, and flies have shown that this type of diet, which is not a form of malnutrition or an exercise in self-starvation, results in longer lives and a lower risk of some cancers, heart disease, and other illnesses associated with aging.

Exactly how a calorie-restricted diet helps stave off age-related diseases and extend lifespan is unknown, but controlling calories can help people lose weight or maintain a healthy weight. Obesity is a major risk factor for many diseases. Eating healthy, nutrient-dense foods can also produce important

physiologic changes in the body, which may lower disease risk.

However, not everyone agrees that such severe calorie restriction is a good idea. Keri Gans, R.D., a nutritionist in private practice in New York City and a spokesperson for the American Dietetic Association, has some concerns about both the short- and long-term effects of calorie restriction.

“If you go too far, it can lead to a lot of problems such as dizziness and fatigue in the short term,” she says. “In the long term, there can be nutritional deficiencies, decreases in bone mineral density that can lead to osteoporosis, and menstrual irregularities that can lead to infertility.

“Once you start to restrict calories, there is no guarantee of adequate nutrition unless you are following a plan monitored by a registered dietitian,” she says. “The less calories you consume, the harder it may be to ensure that your diet includes foods that provide proper nutrition.”

Even though Delaney is a believer, he agrees that calorie restriction is not for everyone. “If you are pregnant or really old, it is not clear that you can get much benefit, and it may be risky,” he says.

He is also quick to point out that a calorie-restricted diet for humans means different things to different people.

“It isn’t any one number; it’s a principle,” he says. “Cutting daily calories by 5 percent is a mild version of calorie restriction, and according to research in lab animals and some in humans, you will get some of the

benefits,” he says. Others may restrict calories by 20 percent, he says.

“There really isn’t any magic number,” Delaney says. His advice? Forget about total calories, measure what you are eating, and go to your doctor to check your fasting glucose, cholesterol, and blood pressure. “Reduce your calories by a little bit for a few months, then go back to the doctor and see if your numbers have improved,” he suggests.

If your numbers have improved, it may mean you are aging at a reduced rate, he says. High cholesterol, blood pressure, and diabetes are all linked to heart disease and premature death.

Malena Perdomo, R.D., an American Dietetic Association spokesperson and a clinical outpatient dietitian at Kaiser Permanente Colorado, in Denver, says the new study is interesting. “We have seen similar results in mice and we know that by controlling body weight, we have better health outcomes,” she says.

Controlling portion sizes and reducing calories is the key to weight loss, but restricting calories should be done carefully, she advises. “The first step is to get rid of high fat, high sugar foods in the diet, and then we move on to the quality of diet and make sure there are adequate fruits, vegetables, whole grains, lean protein, and low-fat dairy in the diet.”

Delaney agrees - these healthful foods are the building blocks of a calorie-restricted diet.



## running

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that heart rates are continually affected by several external stimuli.

In fact, HR can fluctuate depending on different variables such as training duration, caffeine, dehydration, lack of sleep, overtraining, stress, etc. It then becomes difficult to rely on a variable, that is all the more affected by external factors, to adjust one's efforts. During regular exertion, body heat can make the HR increase by 20 beats/min. If you wanted to stabilize your HR, your speed or power (on the bike) would decline and would therefore cause you to lower the effectiveness of your training sessions.

**The first rule regarding HR:** for sessions at a stable intensity, it is preferable to keep speed or power as the focus to justify the intensity of your training sessions. The HR will be used as a standard of reference only.

In addition, HR varies from one activity to another. Depending on your technique, your efficiency, where your session is held, your HR will change from one activity to another. With your training carried out inside on a treadmill on or on bike, you will have heart rates that differ from those reached when you are on the road faced with real road conditions.

**The second rule:** heart rates are specific to the activity you do.

The heart beat is a personal response like any maximum HR. Two people with the same weight, same height and the same physical condition engaging in the same activity at the same speed can experience differences in their HR of more than 20 to 30 beats per minute. It is therefore futile to compare two individuals' heart rates.

**The third rule:** do not compare the heart rates of different individuals.

Your training plan should not be based on the general Intensity Zone recommendations that rely on generic equations (for example,  $220 - \text{age}$ ) that simply attempt to "predict" where your training zones should be. Because HR is your body's response to intensity, that is, a personal response, the values of your Intensity Zones should rather be determined with respect to other physiological variables. This is possible with the help of direct measures recorded during certain tests that reflect your personal response to effort. Primarily, using lactate and  $\text{VO}_2\text{max}$  tests, speed, pace and power, at each stage of the test, are recorded and matched with the corresponding HR. Training zones are then expressed in min/

km, min/500m or even in watts and their corresponding HR.

**The fourth rule:** intensity zones expressed in terms of the HR should be determined based on other indicators of physiological response than simply a maximum HR to be more specific and to perceive the improvements in the individual's physical condition.

HR should really be used as a work "tool." And like any system, there are limits and HR should be used as a source of reference for a given case of exertion. Speed, pace, and power are influenced by significantly fewer factors than HR and can prove to be the best indicators of training intensity. If you use a heart rate monitor, you need to remember the few simple rules mentioned above in this article and also remember that HR is a response to internal and external stimuli that is neither greater nor less significant and should not be the only factor that controls your training intensity.

Thank you and enjoy your run.

Steve Prud'Homme  
Directeur Athlétique,  
Club Athlétique Mansfield, Montréal

## reflexion

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everything, to scrutinize every last detail of every situation, to find a quantitative justification for everything we do. By doing this, we often lose sight of what's important, of what's essential. Taking a walk with one's better half has lost its appeal; people want to train. What's the point of going for a simple bike ride? Once again, it's the work out that people are after. Everything is planned, evaluated, accounted for.

I have a confession to make. I hate training. However, I love bodybuilding. Not the act of lifting weights, but rather the sensation of well-being after having worked my muscles for an hour. I love going for a walk on the mountain and feeling a type of communion with nature. I love going for a bike ride solo and being alone with me, myself and I for several kilometres. I also enjoy cycling with friends, a completely different physical activity in the sense that you no longer feel any of the physical sensations of which I spoke earlier, but boy, do you have a

ball! The most important think is that you are moving, regardless of the activity itself. You're not training. You're moving!

I was observing my children on Sunday afternoon. They are still too young to understand what training is. They did, however, play a good hour of tennis, swam for about twenty minutes, ran after a ball for at least an hour, did a good twenty minutes or so of running back and forth between the house and the park, and spent an incalculable number of minutes climbing the play structures at the park. I think the worst mistake we make with our children is to one day tell them that in order to stay in shape they need to do sports. What we should really be telling them is: "Keep on playing."

The next time you don't feel like going to the gym for your daily workout, go there rather to play. Forget about your exercise session and simply do something that you like. Treadmill, the bike, a yoga class, whatever you like. Just move! Clear your head, feel basic energy and

benefit fully from this little oasis of time spent with yourself. Take advantage of now without thinking of later. Don't think about your health, your fitness level, your half marathon just around the corner. Take advantage of the present to enjoy yourself. The rest will simply fall into place...

Hugues Dufossé  
Club Athlétique Mansfield, Montréal

