

Nutrition at the centre of sustainable corporate wellness

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We live in an era when many of us, not just aspire to, but have an expectation that living well for longer is a real possibility. Increased awareness of the impact of lifestyle on health has made it clear we can't just rely on medical industries to reach this goal - we play the most important part. It is a part that is played not at all in sweeps of grandeur, but in the small details of our daily choices - What will we eat? When will we exercise? How will we get sufficient rest and sleep? What do we need to do to actively manage our stress today?



Corporate Wellness Week, from 2 to 6 July, emphasises the need to properly consider our time spent at work when we answer these questions. We're the master of our own universe at home – we are able to muster up great salads and fresh food inspired dishes; take yoga classes, mountain bike, meditate and walk the dog along the beach in our free time. But what happens when we go to work?

If you are a corporate employee, chances are that you eat nearly half of your daily meals and snacks at work, and your physical activity is low. Typically, home is the haven of well-deserved respite, relaxation and free choice; while the workplace, driven by the demand for efficiencies, is stressful, demanding and limiting. This is why we like weekends.

But two days a week of healthy living is not enough. We need workplaces that also support our wellness, simply because that is where we spend most of our time. This is not just an agenda from the employee perspective. As ADSA spokesperson and Registered Dietitian, Lerato Radebe points out: "Wellness in the workplace is not only a means to keep employees happy, but has tremendous effects on absenteeism, presenteeism and productivity."

Lerato explains that wellness is an active process of becoming aware of and making choices towards a healthy and fulfilling life. "Wellness is more than being free from illness, it is a dynamic process of change and growth. WHO, the World Health Organisation, describes it as "a state of complete physical, mental and social wellbeing, and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity."

Nathalie Mat, another Registered Dietitian and ADSA spokesperson, weighs in: "Nutrition is one of the easiest modifiable factors that controls a person's energy levels and productivity. A company's culture can perpetuate or inhibit healthy eating. I have experience of many companies where health is still not prioritised, leading to poor nutrition and health overall."

So, what can South African business do to promote a sustainable culture of wellness in the workplace?

With nutrition at the centre of wellness, ADSA experts offer these guidelines:

- **Create and maintain higher levels of wellness awareness** through ongoing advocacy, engaging a Registered Dietitian and other wellness professionals through a dedicated wellness programme;
- **Make wellness exciting** by avoiding tick-box exercises or initiatives that are punitive in spirit. Wellness programmes need to be dynamic and up to date with latest trends that are interesting, value-added and that inspire employees to make lifestyle changes;
- **Combat rising healthcare costs** by rewarding employees' participation in your corporate wellness programme through rebates on health insurance;
- **Make healthy eating the workplace norm** with healthy meeting snacks, healthy options in the canteen, water as the primary drink and bowls of fresh fruit;
- **Have a dietitian available on site** and facilitate dietitian-led support groups as a great way to foster healthy eating without forcing programmes on employees.

To find a Registered Dietitian in your area visit <http://www.adsa.org.za/Public/>.

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