

Heart Health Awareness*



Every 37 Seconds an American Dies of CVD

Source: AHA

February is heart awareness month and each year the American Heart Association, in conjunction with the National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute, and other government agencies, reminds us of the impact [cardiovascular disease](#) has on our society. Cardiovascular disease (CVD), holds the number one (heart disease) and number three (stroke) spots as the leading causes of death in the nation today.

The total economic cost of CVD in the United States for 2008 is estimated at \$448.5 billion. This figure includes direct costs of \$296.4 billion (medical associated costs) and indirect costs of \$152.1 billion (lost productivity).¹ Employers realize the significance of these staggering statistics as they experience rising health care and increased disability associated costs. The good news is that CVD is a highly preventable disease.

Everyone can benefit from healthy behaviors and employers can help by guiding their employees to cardiovascular health and, at the same time, demonstrate a caring workplace atmosphere. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) suggests these leadership behaviors to make “healthy choices the easy choices” for the workplace:⁴

- ♥ Establish and support a worksite wellness committee.
- ♥ Start a physical activity or health promotion day, month, or season and invite the company CEO to kick-off the program.
- ♥ Promote awareness of the risk factors for signs and symptoms of heart attacks and strokes (Attachment A).
- ♥ Educate employees about heart disease and stroke prevention by promoting blood pressure and cholesterol level screenings, a healthy diet that includes 5 to 7 fruits and vegetables each day and smoking risks including exposure to secondhand smoke.

To continue the theme of making “healthy choices the easy choices” in the workplace, the CDC suggests:

- ♥ Create opportunities for physical activity and good nutrition by promoting healthy options in cafeterias and vending machines. Provide access to a gym at the workplace or one convenient to work. If possible, consider creating walking trails or place signs near elevators that encourage using the stairs.
- ♥ Provide showers, locker room facilities and bike racks to encourage physical activity and an alternative form of transportation.
- ♥ Prohibit tobacco use in all areas of the workplace, including near entrances and exits.
- ♥ Collaborate with food vendors and cafeteria managers to provide low-cost, healthy food choices.
- ♥ Provide heart-healthy nutrition, weight control, and tobacco cessation classes through a worksite health promotion program.

- ♥ Provide health risk assessments, medical screening, and effective follow-up education and counseling to help employees control their blood pressure, blood cholesterol, and blood sugar levels.
- ♥ Ensure that health plan design provides coverage for preventative services with an emphasis on quality and cost-effective medical care.
- ♥ Provide tobacco cessation counseling, including coverage for FDA-approved medications to help employees quit using tobacco.

According to research, studies, and scientific reviews, these approaches bring visibility to the issues of heart disease and stroke and are interventions found to support cardiovascular health.⁴

Investing in their employees, is the single most important decision a company can make. Studies show that fitness programs can reduce employer healthcare costs by 20 to 50 percent and for every \$1 the average company spends on wellness programs, they receive an average of \$3 to \$7 in net return on their investment.¹ Reducing just one health risk increases an employee's productivity on the job by 9 percent and reduces absenteeism by 2 percent.¹ How do these statistics resonate for your company?

Attachment A: Warning Sign of a Heart Attack and Stroke ³

Heart Attack

Some heart attacks are sudden and intense, but most start slowly, with mild pain or discomfort. Often the people affected aren't sure what is wrong and wait too long before getting help. Here are some signs that can mean a heart attack is happening.

- ♥ Chest discomfort. Most heart attacks involve discomfort in the center of the chest that lasts more than a few minutes, or that goes away and comes back. It can feel like uncomfortable pressure, squeezing, fullness, or pain.
- ♥ Discomfort in other areas of the upper body. Symptoms can include pain or discomfort in one or both arms, the back, neck, jaw, or stomach.
- ♥ Shortness of breath. May occur with or without chest discomfort.
- ♥ Other signs. These may include breaking out in a cold sweat, nausea, or lightheadedness.

If you or someone you're with has chest discomfort, especially with one or more of the other signs, don't wait longer than 5 minutes before calling for help. Call 9-1-1.

Calling 9-1-1 is usually the fastest way to get lifesaving treatment. Emergency medical services (EMS) staff can begin treatment when they arrive — up to an hour sooner than if someone gets to the hospital by car. The staff is trained to revive someone whose heart has stopped. You will also be treated faster in the hospital if you come by ambulance.

Stroke

- ♥ Sudden numbness or weakness of the face, arm, or leg, especially on one side of the body.
- ♥ Sudden confusion, trouble speaking or understanding.
- ♥ Sudden trouble seeing in one or both eyes.
- ♥ Sudden trouble walking, dizziness, loss of balance, or coordination.
- ♥ Sudden, severe headache with no known cause.

Any of the above symptoms may be temporary and last only a few minutes. This may be due to a “mini-stroke” called a transient ischemic attack (TIA). TIAs are extremely important indicators of an impending stroke. Do not ignore them! If symptoms appear, Call 9-1-1 to get medical attention immediately.

Source: The American Heart Association

Workplace Assistance from the American Heart Association

[Start! Moving for Employers](#)

American Heart Association's Start campaign can help. Their program and tools will jump-start your workplace's wellness program and get your employees moving!

First, get the stats on why workplace fitness creates a win-win for your employees and your bottom line. Download presentations, tips and more.

To get started:

1. Become a Start! Fit-Friendliest Company. [more](#)
2. Start! A Walking Program for your employees at work. [more](#)
3. Enroll your company into the Start! Heart Walk. [more](#)
4. [Download](#) our Brown Bag Presentation to educate your employees on Start!

Still not sure what to do? Review our [frequently asked questions](#) or contact your [local office](#). We have dedicated teams across the country ready to get your company started.

National Heart Lung and Blood Institute Annual Campaign

[National Wear Red Day](#) is February 1st, a day when Americans nationwide will wear red to show their support for women's heart disease awareness.⁵

References

*The Council for Disability Awareness (CDA) would like to thank The Hartford's Center for Ability for providing the content.

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2. Know the Facts, Get the Stats 2007. Our Guide to Heart Disease, Stroke Risks. Accessed 2008 January 7.
3. Start Moving For Employers. Accessed 2008 January 8.
4. U.S. Department of Health & Human Services. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Moving into Action: Promoting Heart-Healthy and Stroke-Free Communities. Accessed 2008 January 7.
5. National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute National Wear Red Day. <http://www.nhlbi.nih.gov/health/hearttruth/>. Accessed 2008 January 2.