

THOUGHT LEADERSHIP SERIES

7 ways to boost employees' health in 2022

If clear processes are not outlined for staff, it is likely that employees will face one of the most detrimental results of remote work to date – burnout. After two tough years of uncertainty, forced isolation and a constant fear of getting sick with COVID-19, many of your employees are likely feeling the impact of the pandemic on their health.

They may be experiencing higher stress levels, like almost half of all Canadians surveyed last year by Statistics Canada. They may have packed on extra pounds, as did more than 40 per cent of Canadians, according to a recent Dalhousie University study. Or they may have started to take medications to treat depression or anxiety.

As a human resource professional, you're in a unique position to help people in your organization improve their health in 2022.

In my experience, navigating the pressures of COVID-19, I offer you my top seven recommendations for supporting your employees' health in the New Year.

Turn New Year's resolutions into healthy routines

It happens at the start of each year: we all resolve to eat healthier meals, exercise regularly and take better care of ourselves. In 2022, help employees turn their resolutions into routines by scheduling healthy activities into their calendars. Encourage them to set daily reminders to eat a healthy breakfast, lunch, and dinner and to stay hydrated throughout the day. Push out alerts that will prompt them to take breaks and create opportunities for sharing information on health-critical topics such as getting enough exercise and sleep.

Ensure they're setting healthy boundaries

Are your employees sending email past midnight or, if they're going into a physical workplace, do you notice a few staying behind while everyone else makes their way to the exit? Let employees know it's important to create – and maintain – boundaries between work and home. You can start by urging managers to avoid communicating with their team members after business hours and to set realistic project deadlines. You might even consider mandating these boundaries, at least until it becomes embedded into your workplace culture.

Help them feel and stay connected

Encourage your employees to engage in activities and programs that strengthen their social ties, even as they continue to work at safe distances from each other. Organize group challenges that get everyone outdoors, such as a short walk each day with family members or neighbours. Then ask them to post pictures from these activities on your organization's intranet or social media page – it's a good way to keep employees accountable and committed to a program.



STÉPHANIE MYNER-NHAM
CHIEF HUMAN RESOURCES OFFICER,
EXPRESS SCRIPTS CANADA



Promote your wellness programs

Make sure your employees are aware of all the wellness programs available to them through your health benefits provider, or directly through your organization. Do they have access to cognitive behaviour therapy through your employee assistance program, or to in-person and online meditation classes at the gym that offers your company a corporate discount? Can they get nutrition counselling or advice from a nutritional expert? While these programs may be spelled out in your health benefits brochure, it's a good idea to highlight them in your employee communications.

Celebrate and respect vacations

Employees often have a hard time breaking away from work, even when they're supposed to be on vacation. Urge your employees to take the holidays they're entitled to and make it a rule for all vacationing workers to set up out-of-office email and voice mail messages that include the name and contact details of a support team member. It's also important that managers and co-workers know they're not to contact their vacationing teammate – unless they just want to say hello and inquire about the weather.

Send a reminder about annual checkups

Chances are many of your employees have not gone in for their annual medical exam over the last two years. Encourage them to set aside some time in 2022 to see their primary care physician as well as other professionals on their care team, such as their physiotherapist or dentist. Even if they feel they're in good shape right now, it's important to stay on top of their health and to at least get a start-of-year baseline of their physical and mental health status.

Direct them to a pharmacist

This is a reminder that beyond dispensing medications, pharmacists have the training and knowledge to guide patients towards better physical and mental health. With close to 39,000 licensed pharmacists in Canada, we're the most accessible healthcare providers in the country. Some of them, like the ones who work for the Express Scripts Canada Pharmacy can even be reached 24/7. The pharmacist is always in!

Stéphanie Myner-Nham is the Chief Human Resources and Privacy Officer at Express Scripts Canada.

