



IMPROVING WELLNESS PROGRAM ROI

A Healthy Habits High Returns® White Paper

Supporting Employee Wellbeing Outcomes Through Behavior-Based
Wellness, Nutrition, and Lifestyle Support

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Wellness isn't a perk — it's a performance strategy®

Executive Summary

Organizations are facing increasing challenges related to employee burnout, disengagement, absenteeism, rising healthcare costs, and declining workplace capacity.

Despite significant investments in traditional wellness programs, many organizations continue to struggle with sustainable employee engagement and meaningful health outcomes.

The challenge is not a lack of information.

The challenge is that many wellness programs focus on providing resources without addressing the behaviors, stress patterns, lifestyle factors, and daily habits that influence how people actually show up at work.

Healthy Habits High Returns® focuses on improving employee wellbeing outcomes while helping organizations strengthen wellness program ROI.

The opportunity is not simply to offer more wellness resources. The opportunity is to support the people behind the performance.

Business Reality

Today's workforce is navigating unprecedented levels of stress, distraction, and overwhelm. Organizations are seeing the impact through:

- Only 23% of employees are actively engaged at work, according to Gallup, leaving the majority of the workforce either disengaged or actively disengaged.
- Approximately 66% of employees report experiencing burnout, contributing to reduced energy, focus, wellbeing, and workplace performance.
- Healthcare costs continue to rise, with some employers reporting annual increases of 10–40%, depending on workforce demographics and claims experience.
- Replacing an employee can cost between 50% and 200% of their annual salary, making retention a significant business concern.
- Employee disengagement costs U.S. organizations an estimated \$350 billion annually in lost productivity.
- Approximately 75% of healthcare spending is associated with preventable chronic conditions influenced by lifestyle and behavior patterns.
- Despite increasing stress and mental health concerns, Employee Assistance Programs (EAPs) often experience utilization rates of only 5–10%, leaving many employees without the support available to them.

Research also suggests that burnout can cost employers thousands of dollars per employee each year through absenteeism, turnover, healthcare utilization, and reduced productivity.

These challenges are often measured separately, yet they are frequently connected through common drivers including stress, nutrition, sleep quality, lifestyle habits, chronic health conditions, and overall wellbeing.

The question for leaders is no longer whether employee wellbeing matters. The question is how to support it effectively.

The Missing Conversation

Many wellness initiatives focus on information. Employees are encouraged to:

- Eat healthier
- Exercise more
- Sleep better
- Manage stress
- Make healthier choices

Most people already know these things. Yet behavior change remains difficult.

Why?

Because behavior is rarely driven by information alone. Behavior is influenced by:

- Stress
- Nervous system regulation
- Habits
- Environment
- Emotional patterns
- Lifestyle inputs
- Capacity

People often do not need more information. They need more support.

Capacity Versus Motivation

One of the most common assumptions in workplace wellness is that employees need more motivation.

In reality, many employees are operating at the edge of their capacity. They may be:

- Caring for aging parents
- Managing chronic health conditions
- Struggling with sleep
- Experiencing financial stress
- Recovering from burnout
- Navigating personal challenges

When we assume people need more motivation, we provide more information. When we recognize they may lack capacity, we begin asking different questions.

- What is draining their energy?
- What behaviors are creating friction?
- What support would help them succeed?

This shift changes everything.

The Whole-Person Approach

At Healthy Habits High Returns®, wellness is viewed through a holistic lens.

Whole-person wellness includes:

Nervous System Regulation

Stress directly influences energy, focus, decision-making, emotional regulation, and productivity.

Nutrition and Metabolic Health

Food influences cognitive performance, mood, energy levels, and long-term health outcomes. Research continues to demonstrate the powerful connection between nutrition and brain function.

Behavior Patterns

People often know what to do. The challenge is understanding what gets in the way. Behavior-based wellness explores the hidden patterns influencing choices and outcomes.

Environment

Workplace conditions, routines, relationships, and daily surroundings all influence wellbeing.

Lifestyle Habits

Small daily inputs compound over time. Sleep, movement, nutrition, recovery, and stress management remain foundational to sustainable health.

Food Is More Than Fuel

Emerging research continues to demonstrate the connection between food, mood, cognition, and performance. As highlighted by Dr. Uma Naidoo in *This Is Your Brain on Food*:

- The gut and brain are directly connected.
- Approximately 90% of serotonin is produced in the gut.
- Nutrition influences mood, focus, anxiety, and cognitive function.

Similarly, Dr. William Li's research emphasizes the body's ability to support healing, immunity, and disease prevention when provided with appropriate nutritional inputs.

Food is not simply a personal health issue. Food is a workplace performance issue.

When energy improves, focus often improves. When focus improves, performance often improves.

The Emerging GLP-1 Conversation

GLP-1 medications are reshaping employer-sponsored healthcare benefits. While these medications may support weight loss and metabolic health, medication alone does not automatically teach:

- Healthy eating habits
- Stress management
- Emotional eating awareness
- Sustainable behavior patterns
- Long-term lifestyle skills

Organizations investing in GLP-1 coverage may improve outcomes when medication is paired with education, behavior support, nutrition guidance, and sustainable habit development.

Because medication may influence appetite. Behavior influences sustainability.

Measuring What Matters

The goal of workplace wellness is not participation for participation's sake. The goal is meaningful outcomes. Employee wellbeing outcomes may include:

- Improved energy
- Better focus
- Reduced stress
- Healthier eating habits
- Improved sleep
- Greater consistency
- Enhanced overall wellbeing

When these outcomes improve, organizations may experience:

- Better engagement
- Stronger retention
- Reduced absenteeism
- Improved productivity
- Lower healthcare costs

This is where wellness program ROI becomes meaningful. The data comes from people. The return reflects the effectiveness of the program supporting them.

A Different Kind of Wellness Support

Healthy Habits High Returns® provides a behavior-based, human-centered layer of support that complements existing wellness initiatives and Employee Assistance Programs (EAPs).

The role is often less about delivering more information and more about helping employees:

- Navigate challenges
- Build healthier habits
- Access appropriate resources
- Improve self-awareness
- Develop sustainable wellness practices

Sometimes employees simply need a trusted, supportive person to help them move forward.

Conclusion

The future of workplace wellness is not about adding more programs. It is about creating more meaningful support.

Organizations that focus on employee wellbeing outcomes while strengthening wellness program ROI are better positioned to build healthier, more engaged, and more productive teams.

Because health is not separate from performance. It drives it. From the inside out.

About Healthy Habits High Returns®

Healthy Habits High Returns® helps organizations improve employee wellbeing outcomes through behavior-based wellness support, practical nutrition guidance, and sustainable lifestyle strategies while strengthening wellness program ROI.

Because wellness isn't a perk—it's a performance strategy®.

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