



Change Outcomes for Cardiovascular Disease

The estimated direct and indirect cost of cardiovascular disease (CVD) and stroke for 2009 is \$475.3 billion.¹ What portion of these costs will your company pay in 2009? Employers can potentially reduce their costs associated with heart disease and stroke by introducing lifestyle changes to their employees for little or no outlay.

Lifestyle risk factors that contribute to cardiovascular disease include lack of exercise, high-fat diet, emotional stress and having a "type A" personality (aggressive, impatient, competitive). Some of the common risk factors for CVD include:²

- smoking,
- high blood pressure (hypertension),
- high cholesterol,
- diabetes,
- family history of heart disease,
- peripheral artery disease, and
- obesity.

Experts agree that diet, lifestyle change, exercise, and medication is the best approach to controlling and preventing CVD.²

A change in diet can reduce the chances of developing CVD. A heart-healthy diet that includes lots of whole grains, vegetables and fruits, chickpeas, beans and soy products as well as olive oil, garlic and avocados can help lower cholesterol. Nuts, such as almonds, walnuts, and pecans, can boost "good" cholesterol. Incorporate fish and seafood into meals a few times a week.

Lifestyle changes such as consuming alcohol in moderation and quitting smoking can raise good cholesterol levels (HDL). It is recommended that women have only one drink per day, while men no more than two per day. Smoking is linked to CVD, and within three years of not smoking, the risk of developing heart disease becomes equal to that of a nonsmoker.

Regular exercise strengthens the heart, lowers bad cholesterol (LDL), raises good cholesterol (HDL), and lowers blood pressure. Exercise can also help control high blood pressure and diabetes. The AHA recommends at least 30 minutes of exercise three to five days a week. Further, manage high blood pressure and diabetes by keeping blood sugars under control. Take a low-dose aspirin daily; this can reduce your risk of heart attack.

Improving the health of workers means lower health insurance costs and fewer missed workdays, two important components that affect an employer's bottom line.

1. American Heart Association. Circulation. Heart Disease and Stroke Statistics 2009 Update: A Report from the American Heart Association Statistics Committee and Stroke Statistics. December 15, 2008; P-e172.
2. News Releases. [Top research advances include studies that influence medical care, apply science to 'real world' communities](#). Accessed February 10, 2009.

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