

On-site **Facilities:** Using What You Have

Employers can contribute significantly to the fight against childhood obesity by looking at existing facilities through a new lens – children. Employers are allowing children access to facilities traditionally provided to improve healthy behaviors for adults, such as on-site fitness facilities or on-site clinics. They are also realizing how child well-being can be improved through programs less conventionally focused on obesity, such as employer-sponsored child care and lactation programs.*

The following section provides employers with examples of how four different existing programs or facilities can be leveraged to combat the childhood obesity epidemic. It also highlights current efforts of Business Group member companies.

1. On-site Fitness Facilities

Physical activity is crucial for children of all ages. According to the National Association for Sports and Physical Education (NASPE), children as young as toddlers need to participate in structured and unstructured physical activity each day. Physical activity helps children develop critical motor skills, build their small and large muscles, improve their coordination and learn good habits for life.¹

Employers might consider ways in which employee fitness centers can be utilized to increase both structured and unstructured physical activity opportunities for children.

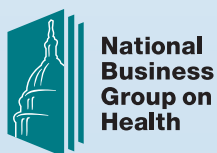


Texas Instruments (TI) allows employees' children to use the company's three fitness facilities and provides access to personal trainers under the supervision of an adult. TI also offers employees' children 6-to-15-years-old the opportunity to participate in *TI Kids Camp* or *TI Teen Camp* during the summer and school breaks. The camps offer a variety of wellness programs and educational classes, including swimming, rock climbing, bowling and nutrition. Throughout the year, TI offers swim teams, tennis lessons, fitness classes and more to children of employees.



NextEra Energy Inc. promotes child and family well-being by granting access to its 43 fitness facilities and 3 onsite primary care health centers. Dependents 16-to-25-years-old are encouraged to use the facilities and can work with health and well-being professionals for a personalized program.

**The Business Group has developed additional resources on the importance of breastfeeding and lactation programs. For more information on this topic, please visit <http://www.businessgrouphealth.org/benefitsttopics/breastfeeding.cfm>.*



2. Child Care Services

Only recently has the contribution of child care to the obesity epidemic been recognized. Child care facilities provide meals, snacks and opportunities for physical activity to a large majority of American children for a large portion of their day.

Although research is lacking, it is believed that children in child care have diets and exercise levels that are less than optimal. The lack of federal nutrition and physical activity regulations, as well as varying guidelines among state and national organizations, are possible explanations for this problem.

While there are no federal nutrition and physical activity regulations for child care facilities, there are clear recommendations from various stakeholders. The publication *Caring for Our Children*, produced by the National Resource Center for Health and Safety in Child Care and Early Education, is considered the most authoritative source on out-of-home care. It provides nutrition recommendations based on the Recommended Dietary Guidelines prepared by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services and the U.S. Department of Agriculture. The National Association for Sport and Physical Education provides physical activity recommendations by age.

Employers can play an important role in the obesity epidemic in two ways:

- ❖ by helping their employees make informed decisions about child care based upon physical activity and nutrition standards (see Handout #4: *What Should I Look for in Child Care?*); and
- ❖ by ensuring their own employer-sponsored child care services meet the recognized national standards described below.

Nutrition Guidelines²

- ❖ Consume whole-grain products often; at least half the grains should be whole grain.
- ❖ Children 2 to 8 years old should consume 2 cups per day of fat-free or low-fat milk or equivalent milk products. Children 9 years old and older should consume 3 cups per day of fat-free or low-fat milk or equivalent milk products.
- ❖ Children 2 to 3 years old should keep total fat intake between 30%-35% of calories; children and adolescents 4-to-18-years-old should keep total fat intake between 25%-35%, with most of the fat coming from sources of polyunsaturated and monounsaturated fatty acids, such as fish, nuts and vegetable oils.



- ❖ Children 2 years of age and older should consume sufficient amounts of fruits and vegetables.

Physical Activity Guidelines^{1,3}

- ❖ Programs should provide children of all ages structured and unstructured physical activity for specified time periods based upon age (see Table 1);

Table 1: Recommendations for Physical Activity by Age

Age	Structured	Unstructured	Total/Day	Days/ Week
Toddlers	30 minutes	60 minutes to several hours	Several hours	Most days
Preschool	60 minutes	60 minutes to several hours	Several hours	Most days
5 to 12 years old	No recommendation	Several hours	Several hours	Each day
Adolescents	No recommendation	60 minutes to 2 hours	Minimum 60 minutes, 2 hours recommended	Daily

Source: *National Association of Sport and Physical Education*

- ❖ Programs should provide children with opportunities to engage in indoor and outdoor physical activity every day;
- ❖ Children of any age should not be sedentary for more than 60 minutes at one time except while sleeping; and
- ❖ “Screen time,” such as television, computers and electronic games should be limited to fewer than 2 hours each day.

The Employee Education section of this toolkit has a handout for employees on how to select a child care facility. See Handout #4: *What Should I Look for in Child Care?*

Child Care at Google: Promoting Healthy Practices for Children

Nestled on the outskirts of Google's Mountain View campus, about an hour south of San Francisco, is an elementary school that has been converted into a child care center for the children of Google employees. Plots of vegetable gardens and a small "forested" area create an enhanced environment that fosters a love of the outdoors.

"This is California, so we spend a lot of time outside," explains Gail Solit, the center's director. "But apart from normal recreation, we also try to engage the children in growing plants and doing other activities that absorb and teach them."

The Mountain View site is one of three serving a total of about 450 children between the ages of 4 months and 5 years. The Google Children's Center offers personalized, nurturing care with an emphasis on exercise and a nutritious diet—key elements of a healthy lifestyle.

The layout of the Mountain View center makes a minimal distinction between indoors and out. Each room opens to a courtyard that doubles as a playground. Age-appropriate toys — play equipment and sandboxes for the younger children, easels and bikes for the older kids — fill each play space. With much of the day focused on outdoor play, the children at Google engage in far more than the 90 minutes of exercise — 30 minutes unstructured, 60 minutes structured — recommended by the National Association of Sport and Physical Education.

Serving Up Recipes for Healthy Living

One of the hallmarks of life at Google is the availability of healthful foods, and the children enjoy this benefit as well. The centers have their own chef, with knowledge and ex-

pertise in preparing nutritious meals that appeal to young children's palettes. "The chef tries to expose the children to different foods," explains Solit. "Quinoa, falafel and goat cheese have all been on the menu, along with fresh fruits and vegetables."

Another effective way to drive home the message of healthy living is to show children that eating well and exercising can go together. Through activities such as gardening, children get the best of both worlds: While exercising, they produce the vegetables they need. Toddlers and preschoolers plant a variety of vegetables and herbs, including squash, tomatoes, basil, pumpkins, rosemary and lettuce. Throughout the year, the children water the plants and weed the garden.

After harvesting the vegetables, the older kids and teachers sometimes cook the food they grew. They have prepared tomato sauce from the tomatoes and basil they grew and salad with lettuce from the garden. Of course, the kids enjoy an added treat—eating their home-cooked meal of spaghetti and fresh salad. "The kids love the experience, especially when the chef joins them at the table," says Solit.

Instilling in children the importance of good foods and exercise is key to keeping childhood obesity at bay. According to research, educating young children at an early age is a powerful way to ensure that they will make healthy choices throughout their lives.



Medtronic allows children at their on-site child care center to use the company wellness center for large motor activities. Wellness center staff also teach weekly exercise and nutrition classes to the children.

3. On-site Clinics and Staff

In 2008, 29% of 453 large employers surveyed had on-site medical clinics.⁴ On-site medical clinics offer convenience to the employee and value to the employer. Seventy-seven percent of employers also believe the clinics provide better access to preventive care.⁴

The majority of on-site clinics offer screening and weight management support to patients. However, few clinics offer services to dependent children.⁵ Employers may consider expanding the traditional services offered at their on-site clinic to children. Specifically, the body mass index screenings and weight management support provided to employees would be beneficial to children and families.



Located on the **Cerner Corporation's** World Headquarters campus in Kansas City, the company's Health Clinic has provided primary care services to associates and their families since 2006. The clinic's motto for dependent care is "growing healthy," which stresses the company's interest in seeking opportunities to reach children.

Staffed by four physicians and one nurse practitioner, the clinic sees children for both well-child and acute care visits. Health care providers complete a variety of preventive care, including obesity screenings and pediatric immunizations.

Cerner also reserves its clinic for kindergarten school physicals 1-2 days per year, seeing 50-60 children per day. Each clinic "care suite" is designed for a separate service (e.g., vision screening, hearing screening, etc.) and offers prizes to children as a way to improve his or her experience. The clinic also offers sports physicals for children of all ages.

4. Take Your Child to Work Day

“Take your Child to Work” days have become annual events for many companies. This event shows children the value of education and teaches them about future work life. Employers also can use this opportunity to educate children about the importance of a healthy life.



During **General Mills’** annual “Take Your Kids to Work” day, the health promotion team provides activities for employees’ children to have fun and learn new healthy habits. In 2008, General Mills provided fitness classes to the children, as well as Frisbee golf and dodgeball games. The company also had a registered dietitian teach children how much sugar is in soda and how to make better fast food choices.



NextEra Energy offers programs on “Take your Child to Work” day, including physical fitness obstacle courses, “germ buster” hand washing classes and “Choose Well” interactive nutrition games.

Employer-sponsored facilities and events traditionally offered to improve the health and well-being of employees can be designed to improve the health of children as well. Fitness centers and child care facilities have the opportunity to improve physical activity levels and the intake of nutritious food. On-site clinics can promote consistent screening for childhood obesity and offer quick and effective treatment when necessary. By instituting these simple changes, on-site facilities have the opportunity to initiate and support lasting behavioral change among children.

References

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- ² U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, U.S. Department of Agriculture. *Dietary guidelines for Americans, 2005*. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, U.S. Department of Agriculture; 2005.
- ³ National Association of Sport and Physical Education. *Physical activity for children: a statement of guidelines for children ages 5–12, 2nd edition*. Available at: http://www.aahperd.org/naspe/template.cfm?template=ns_children.html. Accessed June 22, 2009.
- ⁴ National Business Group on Health, Watson Wyatt. *The one percent strategy: lessons learned from best performers*. Available at: <http://www.businessgrouphealth.org/members/secureDocument.cfm?docID=1231>. Accessed July 6, 2009.
- ⁵ Lundeen A, McManus T, Lux J. *On-site medical clinics: the experience of eleven employers*. Available at: <http://www.businessgrouphealth.org/members/secureDocument.cfm?docID=909>. Accessed July 6, 2009.