

Employee Education: Equipping **Employees** for the **Battle**

Parents have an enormous impact on the childhood obesity epidemic. A child under the age of 5 is at least 3 times more likely to become an obese adult if one parent is obese; if both parents are obese the likelihood increases to 13 to 15 times. Among older children, parental obesity increases the likelihood of becoming an obese adult by 2 to 5 times.¹

Employers can play a critical role in fighting the childhood obesity epidemic by helping families develop healthy lifestyles in the home. This is achieved by providing employees access to educational materials, family-oriented programs or lifestyle coaching specific to child and family health. Although it is a relatively new phenomenon, offering innovative family-based programs is an approach more companies are initiating.

Four examples of family-focused wellness programs include the Baptist Health South Florida "Families Step Up" program, IBM's "Children's Health Rebate," the Johnson & Johnson "Family Activity Challenge" and Healthyroads' "eXtremeFUN" program.

Employers who do not yet have access to or offer family-based programs can support their employees by providing educational materials or hosting lunch and learns that equip parents with the information they need, when they need it. Employers can create their own educational materials, look to external organizations such as state health departments for childhood obesity and physical activity materials, or utilize the following templates to answer parents' common questions related to child obesity:

1. *How Can I Keep My Child at a Healthy Weight?*
2. *What If My Child Seems Overweight?*
3. *What Should Happen at the Doctor's Office?*
4. *What Should I Look for in Child Care?*

A new toolkit developed by the Stop Obesity Alliance, in partnership with the Philadelphia Health Initiative, provides free resources to help employers host lunch and learn discussions about child obesity. Weigh In: Talking to Your Children About Weight and Health contains a facilitators guide and easy-to-use presentation, as well as other materials, and allows employers to help parents talk to their kids about weight and health.



Baptist Health South Florida: “Families Step Up”



Baptist Health South Florida introduced “Families Step Up” in September 2006. The 8-week program, offered twice a year, is designed to teach healthy eating, how to increase physical activity, and ways to improve communication to the entire family. The families learn together and provide each other with support in making healthy behavior changes.

For the 8 weeks, families work to reach their nutritional, physical activity and family time goals. At the start of the program, all participants undergo a series of health screenings that include height and weight, BMI, cholesterol, HDL cholesterol and blood pressure. These measurements are repeated in 12 weeks at a follow-up session.

Since 2006, the program has been offered 7 times, and 38 families have taken part. Thirty of the 38 families (80%) attended all sessions. Of these 38 families, 20 (49 individual participants) provided measurable data by attending the follow-up session, resulting in a 53% completion rate. All participants who attend the follow-up session have shown improvement in at least one health metric.

IBM Children’s Health Rebate



Approximately 45% of IBM employees have children covered by IBM-sponsored health plans. In 2008, the company launched its Children’s Health Rebate program to help parents assist their children in maintaining a healthy weight. The 12-week web-based program includes a \$150 cash rebate that rewards participation.

IBM created this unique, action-oriented program to promote simple activities for the entire family and to equip parents with tools and information that can be used easily in the home environment to address overweight and obesity.



The program focuses on the following four areas:

- ❖ Adequate physical activity;
- ❖ Consistent healthy eating;
- ❖ Appropriate screen time; and
- ❖ Positive parental role modeling.

Employees can elect to participate during the annual fall benefits enrollment. To earn the cash rebate, they also must fulfill the following online requirements:

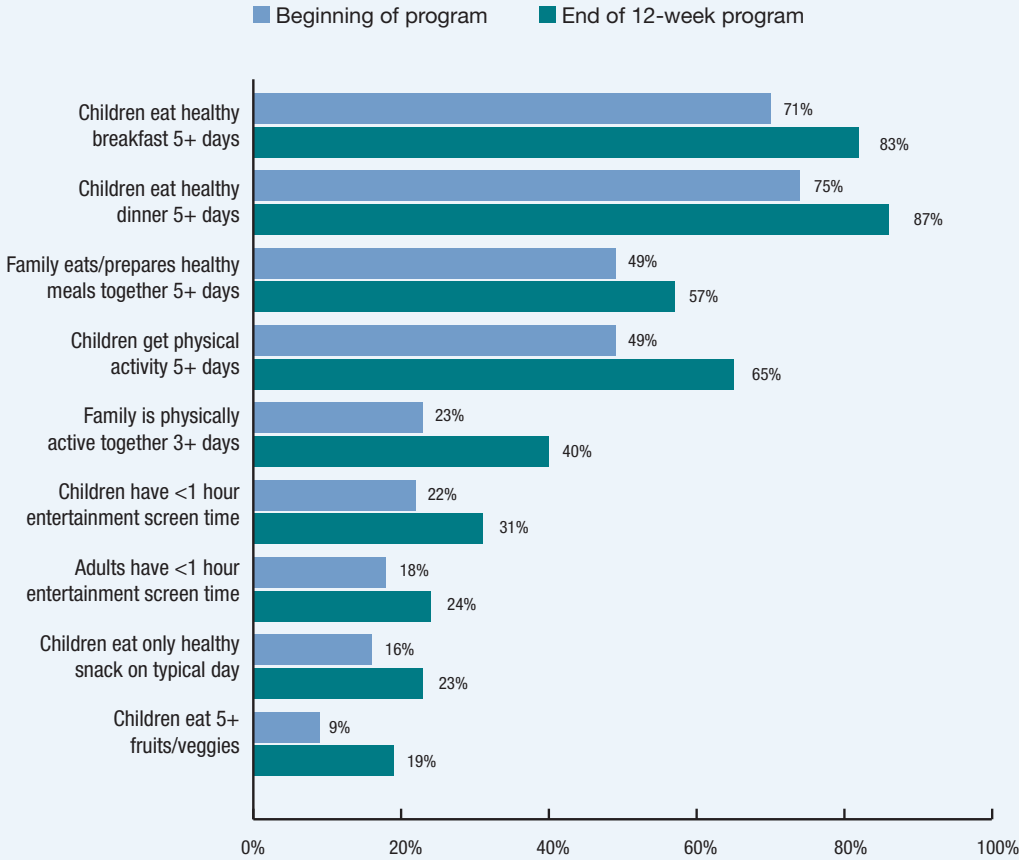
1. Complete a brief family inventory to identify current eating and physical activity patterns.
2. Set family action goals, such as preparing healthy meals together or engaging in outdoor physical activities.
3. Complete the family inventory again after 12 weeks.

Early data indicate employee interest as well as success. In its first year, more than 22,000 IBM employees elected to participate in the Children's Health Rebate program. Of those, 14,000 employees completed the first two requirements for the rebate: the online family inventory and their 12-week action goals. More than 11,000 employees completed the follow-up inventory at 12 weeks and earned the \$150 rebate.

Program evaluation revealed the following:

- ❖ Two thirds of employees who participated in the program reported that their children were exercising more or maintaining appropriate physical activity levels.
- ❖ Fifty-nine percent of children and 64% of adults improved body weight or maintained a healthy weight.
- ❖ Both parents and children showed improvement in healthy eating and physical activity behaviors, as well as a reduction in screen time (see Fig. 1).

Figure 1: Changes in Behavior as a Result of the IBM Children’s Health Rebate Program



Source: Sepúlveda MJ, Lu C, Sill S, et al. An Observational Study of an Employer Intervention for Children’s Healthy Weight Behaviors. *Pediatrics*. 2010;126(5):e1153-e1160.

Johnson & Johnson’s “Family Activity Challenge”



In 2009, the Johnson & Johnson Global Health Services Group created an innovative program to promote family health and combat childhood obesity. The program, named the Family Activity Challenge, is modeled after SPARK (**S**ports, **P**lay and **A**ctive **R**ecreation for **K**ids), a school-based program shown to improve academics, fitness and the enjoyment of physical activity.

While SPARK is designed for schools, the Johnson & Johnson Family Activity Challenge is a home-based program designed for U.S. employees and their children. The program helps parents create valuable family time centered on physical activities.

How It Works

The Family Activity Challenge is a 12-month program that allows families to progress through various stages at their own pace without a predetermined start or end date. It is aimed at families with children 6-12 years of age, and is available to all employees based in the U.S. The program consists of electronic marketing materials, activity brochures mailed to the home, guide books, reminder e-mails and raffle prizes.

❖ Marketing E-mail with Option to Enroll

Seasonally, the Johnson & Johnson Global Health Services Group communicates with employees via email to announce the availability of the Family Activity Challenge. The e-mail contains a voting button to allow employees to easily express interest in the program. If the employee votes positively, the wellness staff is automatically notified and the employee is enrolled in the program.

❖ Activity Brochures

The core part of the Family Activity Challenge is the brochures. Each brochure contains an age-appropriate fitness activity and is addressed and mailed directly to the child. Family activities include games such as capture the flag, hopscotch, sock basketball, Frisbee golf, water balloon volley and more. Each brochure also contains an activity chart and stickers that families can use to chart

“We learned early on that by mailing materials home directly to the child, the family is more likely to participate. The children love getting charts and stickers in the mail and can tremendously influence the parent in completing the activities.”

— Pam Corson, Health Promotion Operations Manager Johnson & Johnson Global Health Services

their activities and progress. Upon completion, the employee or child mails the chart back to Johnson & Johnson to trigger the next brochure mailing.

❖ **Reminder E-mails**

Johnson & Johnson sends parents reminder e-mails to encourage them to have their family complete the activity and return the completed chart. The e-mails also contain valuable tips and resources to make family activity fun.

❖ **Raffle for Prizes**

Upon receipt of a completed chart, the family may be given a prize or entered into a raffle for prizes. In order to promote further engagement, the prizes are often materials needed for the next month's activity.

Employee Feedback

Since June 2010, 400-plus families have enrolled in the program. Satisfaction surveys indicate employees and their families enjoy the program very much – the chance to spend quality time together and to reinforce, at a young age, the importance of staying active for a healthy lifestyle. The children especially enjoy having the brochures and materials sent to them at home.

The Healthroads eXtremeFUN™ Program



Healthroads' eXtremeFUN™ program is designed to help children and teens manage their weight by learning how to make better health decisions. Its motivating purpose focuses on what means the most to kids: "Be healthy so you can have fun."

As its core, the eXtremeFUN program emphasizes individualized interventions and family participation to overcome personal, family, social, and cultural issues that can lead to childhood obesity. This family-oriented approach recognizes the parents' role in creating an environment that supports health and that models good behaviors for the child.

How it Works

The eXtremeFUN program is tailored to children and teens in four age groups:

- ❖ Grades 1-3;
- ❖ Grades 3-5;
- ❖ Grades 6-9; and
- ❖ Grades 10-12.

The enrolled child receives an age-appropriate guidebook that includes lessons in nutrition, physical activity, and stress management. The parent receives a separate, annotated manual that provides healthy living information in an adult format. The parent manuals were designed to teach parents how to speak to their child about the lessons in their child's manual.

However, the eXtremeFUN program goes beyond self-training manuals for the parents and children. Each family also receives personalized coaching calls to help them recognize their strengths and weaknesses, and set healthy living goals. Coaches provide ongoing mentoring and reinforcement as the families work through their manuals and toward their goals. The timing and frequency of the coaching sessions are based upon each family's needs.

Results

The goal for many children is to stabilize weight gain, allowing the child to “grow into their weight.” Toward this goal, Healthyroads has had great success: as of year-end 2009, just over 45% of children lost weight, almost 55% stayed the same weight, and 0% increased their BMI.

Reference

¹ Whitaker RC, Wright JA, Pepe MS et al. Predicting obesity in young adulthood from childhood and parental obesity. *NEJM*. 1997;37(13):869-873.