

## The Worker's Comp and Health Care Crisis

### Baby Boomers Impact the Workers Comp and Health Care System.

Baby Boomers, now in their forties and fifties, make up almost half of your workforce, and 60% of all American adults are overweight and out of shape! This has had a devastating effect on our Worker's Comp and health care system.

In 2000, the Worker's Comp system had the highest comp losses in California history. According to the Peter Burton of the National Council on Compensation Insurance, what happens in California applies in other states across the country. In every state, the Workers Comp system struggles with Medical costs (up an average of 12% in 2002), and Indemnity Costs (up 7%).

In the same year, health care costs made up 14% of the Gross National Product! That's more than two times the total spent on schools and the military combined! It dwarfed the profits of the nations top ten most profitable companies. Ninety-five percent is spent on treatment and only five percent on prevention; yet the major killers—heart disease, diabetes, and stroke—are largely preventable by proper diet and exercise.

Since 1970 when President Nixon enacted the Occupational Safety and Health Act (OSHA), injury rates have decreased by more than half.

So why are comp claims still going through the roof? Certainly, there is some fraud, but consider this: Half of all worker's comp claims are cumulative trauma disorders (CTDs) such as back injuries—the most costly of all workplace injuries. And workers heading into their forties and fifties are at greatest risk.

Like heart disease and type 2 diabetes, most CTDs can be prevented by proper diet and exercise.

**How can employers  
keep their workers  
healthy and productive?**

In 2001, the Surgeon General reported that 60% of adults don't get enough exercise to maintain basic health, and one in four adults are totally sedentary. Half of those who start exercising drop out within six months, and 90 percent quit after a year.

We've focused on the individual with common practices like pamphlet handouts and annual health fairs, with dismal results. We blame the victim when our culture is the problem. We routinely eat fast-food, drive long commutes, work long hours, come home and flop on the couch, exhausted. The majority of us are gridlocked into sedentary lifestyles. Workers continue to suffer soft tissue injuries due to lack of flexibility and strength, and employers suffer the costs, either in worker's comp or health care.

### Worksites must ACTIVELY support healthy lifestyles

Aging, overweight and out of shape employees not only impact your worker's comp and health care costs, they also have a negative impact on productivity. Fit employees of any age have fewer, less costly injuries and illness and can maintain high productivity levels.

How can your organization get workers to adopt healthier lifestyles? By integrating health and fitness into your daily safety routine. The most successful organizations get 100% participation and as much as 70% of employees to make significant lifestyle changes.

#### Here's how to do it:

- Link health and safety systems together
- Make participation mandatory
- Provide brief, daily health and safety training
- Build teamwork to motivate support for lifestyle change
- Train supervisors to lead the effort.

Check out Team Safety, Inc.'s Back Synergy program for more information about integrating fitness and supervisor leadership into a daily safety program.

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