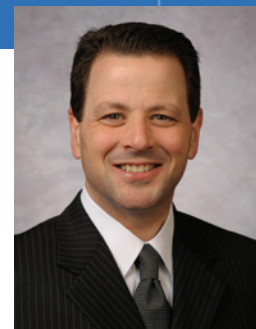


# BEATING DIABETES IN THE WORKPLACE

*Why Your Business Must Fight this Disease*

CONNER  
STRONG &  
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Chances are you have employees who have or will have diabetes. Is there really anything you can do to tackle this disease and the toll it takes on employee health, workplace productivity, and your bottom line? The answer is YES. In fact, the truth is, you can't afford to ignore the impact diabetes has on your business.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, nearly 24 million Americans have diabetes. Diabetes is the leading cause of new cases of blindness among adults aged 20 to 74 years old and is the leading cause of end-stage renal disease. In fact, diabetes is rising at such an alarming rate, one in three Americans born in 2000 are expected to develop diabetes within their lifetime. Researchers based at the University of Chicago project that in the next 25 years, the number of Americans living with diabetes will nearly double. Equally alarming is that spending on diabetes is expected to almost triple from \$113 billion to \$336 billion – even without an increase in the prevalence of the disease.

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Diabetes is a group of diseases marked by high levels of blood glucose resulting from defects in insulin production, insulin action, or both. While type 1 diabetes (or insulin-dependent diabetes) usually strikes children and young adults with no preventions available, type 2 diabetes (or adult-onset diabetes) accounts for over 90% of all diagnosed cases, and can often be prevented through diet, weight loss, and physical activity. In fact, studies show that people at high risk for type 2 diabetes can prevent

or delay its onset by losing 5 to 7 percent of their body weight, eating healthier, and partaking in physical activity for 30 minutes, five days a week.

Diabetes causes a multitude of health issues and other diseases. Complications from diabetes include: heart disease, stroke, blindness and vision problems, kidney damage and kidney failure, nerve damage, infections (especially of the feet), skin problems (infections, sores, itching), and even dental diseases. With such a range of potential health problems, can you really afford to ignore the impact diabetes can have on your business?

Diabetes-related illnesses cause excessive absenteeism and negatively affect productivity. The medical expenditures for those with diabetes are on average 2.3 times higher than those without the disease. With no good news on the horizon and the number of those diagnosed with diabetes expected to increase dramatically, it is



important for employers to acknowledge this disease as a serious threat to their business. Companies that take steps to work with employees who have or may develop diabetes will be better positioned in the future than those who choose not to invest in the health of their employees.

So how does a company begin to help employees manage diabetes or reduce the risk of developing it? First, let's take a look at what is commonly known as the "ABCs of Diabetes."

## A A1c

This blood test reports one's average blood sugar for the past 2 to 3 months. While daily checks are helpful, this test is the only accurate measure of overall diabetes control. According to the American College of Physicians and the American Diabetes Association, this simple blood test will identify if an individual should reduce his or her blood sugar levels. Lowering A1c value by just 1 percentage point, greatly reduces the risk for eye, kidney, and nerve problems.

## B Blood Pressure

Blood pressure control is very important for individuals with diabetes. Blood pressure should be checked often and medications can be taken to control blood pressure.

## C Cholesterol

People with diabetes are at a higher risk of heart attack or stroke. Cholesterol numbers reveal the amount of fat contained in one's blood. LDL cholesterol can clog arteries. Triglycerides can also lead to heart problems. Checking cholesterol levels and getting levels on target are important to preventing life threatening diseases or incidents.

For ABCs it may all sound medically complicated, but the good news is – the best way to achieve good ABC results is to eat healthy and exercise on a daily basis. **Losing as little as 10 pounds will improve a body's ability to use sugar properly.** This is where you, as an employer, can make a real difference.

With the number of hours employees spend in the work environment on a daily basis, employers have a prime opportunity to influence, educate, and assist with the health issue of diabetes. Smart business leaders will recognize this as an opportunity to invest in their employees (and offer value and show concern), but also as a means to improve productivity, lower absenteeism, and lower total health costs. According to the Center for Disease Control and Prevention, diabetic employees who keep their blood sugar down cost employers only \$24 a month, compared with \$115 a month for diabetic employees who do not control their blood sugar. Better yet, by offering programs and activities in the workplace, employers can help their workers delay the onset of diabetes or even avoid the disease altogether. It's simple because the smallest lifestyle changes go a very long way in the prevention of diabetes.

## HOW TO FIGHT DIABETES IN THE WORKPLACE

**Focus on Weight Loss.** When people think "weight loss" they often concentrate on body image and reaching an ideal weight. A business focused on diabetes prevention can educate employees on how all progress, no matter how slight, makes a big difference when it comes to reducing their risk. It has been proven that even losing as little as 5 percent of one's weight can significantly help in preventing the onset of diabetes. With workplace health and wellness programs, employers can help employees lose that 5 percent and more. While these programs will vary by each company's means, there are some actions most organizations can take:

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- > **Start a Walking Club.** Organize a walking club for breaks or lunch periods. Employees keep each other motivated and return to work energized. Some companies hold contests by offering pedometers and rewarding participants for most number of steps/miles walked.
- > **Bring in Healthier Foods.** Order healthy foods for meetings rather than fattening meals and sugary desserts. Provide pitchers of water rather than soda.
- > **Offer Fitness Programs.** Offer employees free or discounted memberships to fitness clubs or arrange for fitness groups on-site after work (e.g. yoga).

- > **Hold Weight Loss Contests.** “Biggest Loser” competitions (modeled after the hit NBC television show) have become popular in the workplace. Use the spirit of competition and financial reward to keep employees focused on losing weight week after week.

Diet and exercise help people lose and maintain their weight, but more importantly they are imperative to maintaining proper blood sugar levels, blood pressure, cholesterol, and diabetes as a whole. It really can be this easy for your business to take on diabetes. Isn't it worth it?

**Focus on Health.** Some of your employees may already have the diagnosis of diabetes or are diabetic without a diagnosis. There are things you can do for them beyond clubs and contests. It is vital for these individuals to manage their disease in order to avoid the serious complications that can arise from high blood sugar. Meeting with a physician, taking blood tests, administering prescribed medications properly, eating a prescribed diet, and exercising are the best practices for such individuals. Employers can help by:

- > **Offering Health Screenings Onsite.** Health screenings can be held on an annual basis or more often. Health professionals should offer one-on-one meetings with

employees to complete HRAs and set short- and long-term wellness goals. Quick glucose tests, cholesterol tests, and body mass index readings can be done on-site during these screenings.

- > **Offering Coaching Services via Phone/Online** Experienced health coaches and advisors can make a big difference to your employees. Clinical specialists assist with dedicated health coaches to give knowledgeable expertise in the field of diabetes and other health issues. Coaches motivate employees one-on-one to reach health goals and keep them on track with taking medication – a major factor in keeping diabetes in check.
- > **Creating Innovative Programs.** Model a program after those with proven results like the Asheville Project. In 1996 the City of Asheville, North Carolina embarked on a project that involved employees who had diabetes and other chronic health problems. These employees were provided with intensive diabetes education through Mission-St. Joseph's Diabetes and Health Education Center and then teamed with community pharmacists who monitored them closely to make sure they were taking medications correctly. As a financial incentive, employees who used participating pharmacists had their co-pays waived. This specialized care and financial incentive resulted in improved A1c levels, fewer sick days, lower total health care costs, and increased pharmacy satisfaction. A win for everyone involved.

Remember, when you make a commitment to implement plans to fight diabetes in the workplace, you're making a commitment to the health of your employees, the level of your productivity, and the financial strength of your company.

info

Conner Strong & Buckelew works with clients every day to design programs to address health and wellness and chronic conditions.

**For more information, please contact us at 1-877-861-3220.**

## ▶ HELPFUL LINKS

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention:  
Diabetes Public Health Resource  
[www.cdc.gov/diabetes](http://www.cdc.gov/diabetes)

American Diabetes Association  
[www.diabetes.org](http://www.diabetes.org)

American College of Physicians:  
Diabetes Portal  
[diabetes.acponline.org](http://diabetes.acponline.org)

The Asheville Project  
[www.theashevillesproject.net](http://www.theashevillesproject.net)

WebMD Diabetes Guide  
[diabetes.webmd.com/guide/default.htm](http://diabetes.webmd.com/guide/default.htm)

American Heart Association: Diabetes  
[www.heart.org/HEARTORG/Conditions/  
Diabetes/Diabetes\\_UCM\\_001091\\_  
SubHomePage.jsp](http://www.heart.org/HEARTORG/Conditions/Diabetes/Diabetes_UCM_001091_SubHomePage.jsp)

U.S. Department of Health and Human  
Services: Diabetes Detection Initiative (DDI)  
[ndep.nih.gov/media/ddi](http://ndep.nih.gov/media/ddi)

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