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Dial-up wellness

Lydell C. Bridgeford

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Through technology and service integration, the line separating care for employees' physical and emotional wellness is quickly being erased. As a case in point, EAP provider ACI Specialty Benefits Corp. launched the GetFit Cell Phone Diet within its AppleCore wellness program.

The high-tech service gives employees a calorie calculation on their food consumption, which can be administered any time of day and at any location with the use of a cell phone.

Workers can track, add up and evaluate their calorie intake by taking a snapshot of their meals with their camera phone and sending the picture to ACI's team of fitness and nutrition specialists. Within 24 hours, they will receive an assessment of their edibles with information on the nutritional value, an approximate calorie count, their body mass index, basal metabolic rate and an overall summary tailored to their diet of preference.

Dr. Ann Clark, CEO of ACI, says, "As health care premiums have spiraled out of control, and obesity-related illnesses eat up much of the cost, more employers realize proactive prevention may be their best bet."

The United States showed a 110% increase in the prevalence of obesity from 11.6% in 1990 to 24.4% in 2006, according to the United Health Foundation, a health policy organization based in Minnesota.

Michael La Voy, head of AppleCore wellness program, says most organizations participating in the program are clients of the firm's EAP services.

He estimates about 5% to 10% of the company's clients have implemented ApplCore, and those figures continue to grow.

The program provides a wide mix of services and tools, such as health risk appraisals, disease management, on-site prevention activities, a Web site and internal database connecting employees and family members to resources. It's priced as low as \$4.00 per employee per year.

"You can expect a tremendous amount of growth in wellness within organizations over the next two to three years," says La Voy.

Employers are increasingly in agreement that a healthy mind and body go hand and hand, bringing integrated wellness services to new heights. Read more about making benefits integration successful: Can't we all just get along? - L.C.B.

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