

The background image shows four glass jars with blue rims, each containing a different colored smoothie (yellow, red, green, and red) and a metal spoon. They are arranged on a dark wooden tray. In the foreground, there are fresh blackberries and raspberries. The entire scene is set against a blurred green background, suggesting an outdoor setting.

Best Practices

Work Well: Wellness in the Workplace

Best practices for effective program implementation

Rachel Tansey, MA, Assistant Professor /
FCHS Educator; Delma Yorimoto, MS, MBA,
Senior Program Coordinator / FCHS
Rutgers University, New Jersey

Abstract

The Work Well, Wellness in the Workplace (Work Well) program is an online health promotion initiative aimed at enhancing participants' knowledge and intentions to improve healthy habits, increasing physical activity, and self-reported wellness as well as quality of life. Utilizing a pre- and post-survey design, the program assessed changes in those areas. Results indicated positive improvements in participants' understanding and intentions regarding health behaviors, aligning with existing research on the effectiveness of evidence-based interventions. This paper discusses best practices for implementing virtual health promotion initiatives in the workplace, informed by the Work Well study.

Introduction

Over a decade ago, a partnership was formed through cross-county collaboration to develop a plan addressing the needs of employee wellness. Family & Community Health Sciences (FCHS) educators assessed the needs of business staff and found it imperative to create educational programs focused on the health and well-being of employees. Fouad et al. (2017) found that workplace interventions increased productivity. In a systematic review, Javanmardi et al. (2025) found that health promotion in the workplace is effective for industrial workers. The virtual Work Well, Wellness in the Workplace (Work Well) program aims to reach employees of both traditional and non-traditional work settings.

This program has grown over the years with partial funding and support from both the Department of FCHS, part of Rutgers University Cooperative Extension, as well as support from a New Jersey Department of Health grant. Under the guidance of Rutgers University faculty and wellness coordinators, a variety of educational interventions have been developed, such as informative videos, electronic newsletters, and healthy recipe suggestions. These resources were utilized to build the Work Well intervention.

The Work Well program addresses a variety of topics (see Appendix 1) based on the interests of employees and the criteria of the researchers. Blake and Gartshore (2016) found in a systematic review that participants of an online intervention significantly improved their knowledge around nutrition and physical activity. Employee engagement for the Work Well initiative has some of the most engaged participants offered by the FCHS Department, reaching thousands monthly statewide. In the meta-analysis from Carolan et al. (2017), it was confirmed that digital psychological interventions showed effectiveness for employee engagement and rates of adherence. The Work Well initiative prioritizes making health and wellness accessible in the workplace, enabling employees to adopt healthier lifestyles and reduce the risk of chronic diseases.

Purpose

The FCHS Department, Work Well team is dedicated to enhancing overall well-being by emphasizing the importance of healthy living and promoting more active lifestyles. Goetzel et al. (2014) found that employers who implemented health promotion programs maximized the likelihood of positive health and financial results for both employee and employer. Research underscores the preventability of heart disease and obesity through early intervention. By addressing prevalent health issues such as obesity, heart disease, diabetes, and cancer, the study underscores the significance of prevention through education on proper nutrition and healthy practices.

Research shows that preventative lifestyles and interventions are essential for reducing risk factors contributing to chronic disease. The Work Well objectives are to promote health and wellness in the workplace through an engaging online platform designed to help participants:

- Enhance knowledge and intention to create/maintain overall healthy habits around nutrition and stress management.

- Increase intention to incorporate healthier levels of physical activity.
- Improve self-reported wellness and quality of life.

Background

This Work Well initiative addresses the “Healthy People 2030” campaign, a national United States Department of Health and Human Services initiative to increase the proportion of worksites that offer an employee health promotion program (Office of Disease Prevention and Health Promotion, n.d.). The program received Institutional Review Board approval (FWA00003913) to deliver weekly sessions (see Appendix 1) featuring evidence-based education on wellness topics, along with pre- and post-surveys administered over a 12-week period. Some of the topics address eating nutritious foods, reducing stress using mindfulness techniques, promoting positive self-image and self-care, enhancing exercise habits, along with practical advice on managing personal finances and balancing work/family responsibilities.

To address the challenge of educating busy adults, the Work Well team offers online sessions accessible at participants' convenience, integrating wellness education into the workplace to reach a diverse audience. Wojcik et al. (2024) note that employers are shifting towards programs focusing on overall well-being, including work-life balance, stress management, mental health, and flexible physical activity options for various work settings.

The Work Well web-based program was marketed through email and promotional flyers to all employees through the FCHS Department. Those who completed the pre-survey were then invited to participate in the study to explore diverse learning opportunities for healthier living.

Findings

In 2023, a pilot study was implemented at two sites, at both the Hudson County Department of Health and with the employees of Monmouth County, serving a total of 67 adult participants/employees. The initiative at both sites was very successful and has shown to be effective for those participating. One individual, who identified as a diabetic female, shared, *“The videos were great for me. The tips are easy to follow, they helped me to return to healthy habits like exercising more.”* The post survey data showed that 47 out of 62 of the enrolled participants said that this program helped them to increase their physical activity. Participants shared some of the strategies that contributed to this success, such as partnering with a family member to go for walks, finding time during work breaks to stretch, and taking the stairs instead of the elevator, among others.

In addition, 47 out of 49 post-survey respondents shared that because of the intervention, they made positive changes to adopt a healthier lifestyle. Twenty-five out of 49 post survey respondents reported increased knowledge about healthier foods and skills to prepare recipes, while 23 out of 49 participants reported increased consumption of healthier foods, including fruits and vegetables. One participant said: *“Since the wellness program I have learned to consume more fruits and vegetables... I am exercising more and taking longer walks. It just helps me to de-stress and take in the beautiful scenery.”*

Site managers expressed a desire to continue with more programmatic efforts, and in 2024, Work Well was implemented for workers employed by Hudson and Monmouth Counties, with 281 employees engaging on their wellness journey. The initiative achieved significant outcomes: 67% of participants completed the post-survey. Of the 188 respondents, 97% reported making positive lifestyle changes, including: 79% increased physical activity by using work breaks, walking more, and taking stairs, 57% adopted healthier diets, 56% experienced overall health improvements, 55% increased their

vegetable intake, and 54% prepared healthier meals.

Both implementation years, participants (86% female and 14% male) reported meaningful changes, such as switching from sugary drinks to water, meal prepping, and adding exercise to their routines. One participant noted, *“The program reminds us to put ourselves first, eat healthier, and destress.”* The Work Well initiative continues to empower participants with sustainable health practices, demonstrating the impact of accessible wellness education. Plans are underway to expand efforts and reach new communities, including Spanish-speaking audiences. The lessons learned from the research and implementation of the 2023 and 2024 interventions yielded the following best practices.

Best Practices

The Work Well curriculum was collaboratively developed by extension professionals and registered dietitians to deliver comprehensive, evidence-based health and wellness content. Drawing on the Dietary Guidelines for Americans (U.S. Department of Agriculture & U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2020) and integrating established best practices in physical activity and stress management, the program was intentionally designed to promote sustainable behavior change. The curriculum development was guided by the Health Belief Model (HBM), which posits that individuals are more likely to engage in health-promoting behaviors when they recognize personal health risks, perceive benefits from behavior change, and feel empowered to act. Janz and Becker (1984).

To enhance participant engagement and knowledge retention, the program incorporated multiple interactive learning modalities, including surveys, videos, wellness challenges, recipes, webinars, and curated resource links, facilitating both applicability and enjoyment. Personalization was emphasized by encouraging participants to adapt the content to their individual health goals, preferences, and constraints, using tools such as MyPlate Plan and Shop Simple with MyPlate for customized meal planning

and activity tracking. Practical implementation was further supported through actionable resources, including grocery lists, meal preparation guides, efficient cooking strategies, and accessible physical activity routines.

Cultural and linguistic inclusivity was prioritized through the provision of Spanish-language materials and the integration of culturally relevant recipes and practices to enhance accessibility. Ongoing program evaluation, informed by participant feedback, utilization data, and outcome metrics, allowed for continuous refinement of content, delivery methods, and engagement strategies. These ongoing adaptations included the expansion of Spanish-language offerings, simplification of recipes, and optimization of webinar lengths to meet evolving participant needs.

In addition, digital delivery was informed by general best practices for online wellness programs. The platform was designed to be user-friendly, with an intuitive interface, clear navigation, and minimal technical barriers to accommodate varying levels of digital literacy. Device accessibility was prioritized by utilizing virtual platforms such as Zoom, text messaging, email, and web-based links, all accessible via computers or mobile devices. Privacy and security protocols adhered to applicable data protection regulations, as per the Institutional Review Board confidentiality regulations, to ensure the safeguarding of personal health information and to maintain participant trust.

Discussions and Limitations

The Work Well program has demonstrated positive outcomes and significant potential for continued growth; however, several limitations should be addressed to support its long-term sustainability. Usability is inherently subjective, as features intuitive to some participants may pose challenges to others, particularly across varying age groups, technological proficiencies, and accessibility needs. Limited engagement in feedback mechanisms further constrains opportunities

for continuous improvement, especially when participation incentives are lacking. Additionally, while the program offers extensive resources, the volume of information may contribute to cognitive overload, potentially diminishing engagement and limiting overall effectiveness.

Despite these challenges, the Work Well program exemplifies how Extension professionals can address the evolving needs of a diverse workforce through innovative, inclusive, and evidence-based strategies. By embedding wellness into daily routines, the program promotes healthier, more productive work environments. Its core objective—to foster a culture of health through accessible virtual initiatives—empowers employees to adopt sustainable behaviors, enhance physical and mental well-being, and strengthen long-term health literacy. This approach supports improvements in knowledge, intentions, and self-reported wellness through digital health promotion interventions.

Author Information

Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to Rachel Tansey, MA, Assistant Professor / FCHS Educator, Rutgers Cooperative Extension of Monmouth County, 4000 Kozloski Road, Box 5033 Freehold, NJ 07728-5033; Phone: 732-431-7260. tansey@njaes.rutgers.edu.

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Appendix 1

The Work Well intervention provides 12 weekly sessions with educational materials delivered via Microsoft Outlook / email including a confidential pre and post survey. Each email contained links to three educational components, designed to promote engagement and encourage sustainable behavior change. The online feature allowed for self-paced learning while maintaining a cohesive flow across the program.

1. 5-minute Video lessons providing accessible, concise education.
2. Webinars – recorded sessions featuring expert speakers in nutrition, fitness, and stress management to build on the 5-minute videos.
3. Factsheets, Recipes, and/or Newsletters – Practical resources reinforcing video and webinar content, covering nutrition facts, easy meal prep ideas, and wellness tips tailored to workers with time and resource constraints.

Topics explored were the following:

1. Health Benefits of Yoga
2. Breathe your Stress Away
3. Laughter is the Best Medicine
4. Cultivate Calm in Your Life
5. Physical Activity While on the Job
6. Sustaining a Healthy Lifestyle
7. Boosting Your Immune System
8. Brain Food
9. Super Snacks
10. Food and Mood
11. Hydration Happiness
12. Power of Prevention
13. Beating the Blues
14. Infusing Ecotherapy into Your Day
15. Create a Colorful Plate
16. Gluten Free
17. MIND Diet
18. Longevity and Health
19. Have a Healthy Heart
20. Pass (Up) the Salt
21. DASH Diet
22. Healthful Harvest
23. Healthy Meetings
24. Stress Less on the Job

The table below shows an example of weekly lessons:

Appendix 1

Curriculum			
Topics	Lesson Links	Selected Objectives	Health Believe Model Components
Stress Management	<p>5-min video: Stress Less on the Job.</p> <p>Wellness Wednesdays with FCHS Webinar: Slowing Down: Rethinking Your Relationship with Time</p> <p>Recipe: Quinoa, Roasted Veggies and Fresh Herb Salad</p> <p>Resource: Workplace Wellness: Stress Less on the Job</p>	Identify 3 practical stress management techniques or mindfulness exercises to enhance mental well-being.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Perceived Severity: Educating participants on the health risks of chronic stress, including its impact on cardiovascular and cognitive health. • Perceived Benefits: Highlighting the physical and mental health improvements associated with stress reduction. • Self-Efficacy: Providing practical workplace stress management strategies, such as mindfulness and time management techniques. • Cues to Action: Reinforcing stress resilience through brain-supportive nutrition with a healthy recipe.
Nutrition	<p>5-min video: Pass (up) the Salt</p> <p>Wellness Wednesdays with FCHS Webinar: Lose the Salt, not the Flavor: Reducing Sodium in your Everyday Cooking</p> <p>Recipe: NJ Broiled Scallops & Farro Salad</p> <p>Resource: Lose Salt not the Flavor</p>	<p>Name 3 way to reduce excess sodium in meals</p> <p>Name 3 spices that can boost flavors and reduce the need to add salt to homemade meals</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Perceived Severity: Educating participants on the health risks of excessive sodium intake, including hypertension and cardiovascular disease. • Self-Efficacy: Providing a resource on flavorful spice alternatives to reduce sodium in meals. • Perceived Benefits: Emphasizing the advantages of homemade meals, including better sodium control and overall health benefits. • Cues to Action: Offering low-sodium recipes to support practical implementation of dietary changes.