

# The healthy workplaces every company should copy

Like the sound of free lunches and sleep pods? Drop a hint to your boss with these healthy work perk ideas from Aussie offices. By *Liz Graham*

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For more than eight million Australians, one-third of their life is spent at work. With **obesity** rates climbing faster in this country than anywhere else in the world, plus chronic diseases such as **type-2 diabetes** and mental health issues such as **depression** on the rise, it's well and truly time that workplaces take proactive steps to improve the health of their employees.

The benefits are numerous. As well as having happier, healthier employees, businesses also see significantly reduced absenteeism and improved productivity levels. Research by health fund Medibank Private found that, on average, an unhealthy employee takes up to 18 days off a year; a healthy employee takes only two. And earlier this year, a study by Pricewaterhouse Coopers found that for every dollar companies spent on their employees' mental health, they could expect a return of \$2.30.

These four companies of varying sizes and budgets are leading the way with work wellness programs.



## *GOOGLE*

The internet company has more than 800 staff at its head office in Sydney.

**Health philosophy:** “We look at health in a holistic way. It’s not only physical, but also emotional, and financial,” Shannon Stephenson, an HR specialist for Google, says. “We want health to be as easy and accessible for our staff as possible.”

### **Staff benefits:**

- Free breakfast, lunch and dinner in the cafeteria (with meals coded according to nutritional content), plus healthy snacks and fruit.
- Free exercise classes, [yoga](#) and [Pilates](#), plus massage and physiotherapy.
- Subsidised gym membership.
- Free health insurance.
- Relaxation rooms with sleep pods, casual work areas with hammocks (pictured, above) and standing desk areas.
- Free seminars on topics such as [quitting smoking](#), improving motivation and boosting financial skills.
- Free skin checks, diet consultation and flu shots.
- Scooters to travel between offices (pictured, above).

**The effect:** “Having so much onsite keeps productivity high,” Stephenson says. “For instance, I recently broke my arm and needed weekly physio. At first, I was going to the hospital, which took three to four hours out of my day. When I switched to the physio at work, the difference was amazing. The onsite physio program has been fully utilised since the day we introduced it and has continued to expand.”

**Hint to the boss to...** Ask for ideas and feedback: “We have a forum on our intranet where staff can lodge feedback on our food – people get really passionate about it,” Stephenson says. “We also do an annual survey for general feedback and keep track of health insurance metrics in order to be more preventative. That’s how we saw the need for onsite physio and massage, both of which have been really successful.”

### **STEAL THIS TIP**

Create a relaxation area in your office with some leafy plants, a comfy chair and magazines.

EMAIL



## **SWISSE**

The manufacturer of vitamins, supplements and skincare products has 150 staff at its Sydney and Melbourne offices.

**Health philosophy:** “If we can provide a workplace that’s as stress-free as possible, we’ll have people who are more competent and focused,” Swisse CEO Radek Sali says. “Every employee’s own health is essential to our culture.”

### **Staff benefits:**

- Free breakfast for early starters, plus deliveries of fresh fruit.
- A [naturopath](#) and dietician who map out plans for employees to maximise health and wellbeing.
- One day off a month (called a “health and [happiness](#)” day) for all full-time staff, in months without a public holiday and in addition to their annual leave.
- \$1000 of products from the Swisse vitamins, skincare and sports nutrition ranges.

- Incentives to recognise and reward staff, such as tickets for major sponsorship events.

**The effect:** The most tangible effect is the reduction in sick leave by 50 per cent, Sali says. “We get it back in droves with our workers’ attitudes, too,” he adds. “People feel very proud of working here.”

**Hint to the boss to...** Start small: “Our free meals started as one lunch a week, our monthly day off began as a couple of days off a year,” Sali says. “We expanded it as we could afford it. Setting up healthy practices is easy if you’ve defined the values you want to have.”

### **STEAL THIS TIP**

Don’t have fresh food deliveries? Team up with colleagues to create your own weekly fruit basket.



## ***COTTON ON GROUP***

The retail group has 1000 staff at its head office in Victoria.

**Health philosophy:** “When we were a company of 50, we focused on exercise and nutrition,” Luke McLean, group health and wellbeing manager, says. “Now as a global company of more than 19,000, we take a holistic approach across our three pillars: mind, body and spirit. These create an environment that equips and inspires our staff to perform at their best.”

**Staff benefits:**

- Free onsite gym.
- Subsidised healthy meals.
- Onsite health treatments.
- Team sports events.
- Onsite development centre.
- Bring your dog to work days.
- Discount health insurance.

**The effect:** "Energised, connected and balanced employees [are] a nice formula for performing at your best."

**Hint to the boss to...** Do it for the right reasons: "If your focus is return on investment, [staff] will pick up on that," McLean says. "Many of our programs have been because we feel it's the right thing to do."

**STEAL THIS TIP**

Not allowed animals in the office? Arrange a bring your dog to lunch day at a nearby park.



## ***FITNESS AUSTRALIA***

The fitness industry association has 23 staff nationally, with main offices in Melbourne and Sydney

**Health philosophy:** “While our staff care about health and fitness, our jobs are mostly sedentary,” CEO Laretta Stace says. “Two-and-a-half years ago, we decided to make changes to reflect our commitment to a fitter Australia. With a tight budget, we looked at three areas: increase physical activity, provide education on healthier eating and support stress management.”

**Staff benefits:**

- Annual consultation with dietitian and cooking demos.
- Weekly delivery of fresh fruit.
- A stand-up desk and an exercise bike in the office.
- Group fitness sessions.
- An extra hour off every week for exercise.
- Annual counselling session (with R U OK? Day).

**The effect:** “People’s exercise participation rose by 13%,” Stace says. “We also ask staff to rate their sleep, diet, happiness and energy. Since this initiative began, every rating has gone up.”

**Hint to the boss to...** Base it on teamwork: “Limit competitive activities,” Stace says. “It’s better to get everyone involved, so they can all take something away from it.”

**STEAL THIS TIP**

Enter a work team into a fun run or other fitness event and then build group training sessions into your lunch break.

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