

## Who is responsible for employee health?

December 01, 2010 | By April Scott-Clarke



A balanced diet, daily exercise and proper sleep are essential to good health. For many, this is common knowledge. But if so, then why aren't more people practicing these good habits?

According to the *Sun Life Canadian Health Index*, compiled by Ipsos Reid, 81% of Canadians surveyed believe that common diseases are completely or mostly preventable, yet 63% have adopted a pattern of unhealthy behaviours.

The study asked respondents about their lifestyle choices and decisions on smoking, exercise, diet, sleep and water intake. The result was that 63% of respondents reported having three or more unhealthy behaviours related to these factors. Data from The Canadian Institute of Health Research state that these people are more likely to incur higher group benefits costs due to absenteeism, drug claims and disability.

Respondents also indicated that lack of willpower or motivation (61%), lack of time (46%) and lack of money (39%) were the main barriers to achieving a healthier lifestyle.

The Sun Life study also revealed that 60% of Canadians believe their employers have some responsibility when it comes to their health.

Kevin Dougherty, president of Sun Life Financial Canada, says, "It's clear that Canadians understand the connection between maintaining a healthy lifestyle and preventing chronic diseases. Now we just need to start taking action. Employers have a great opportunity to be part of the solution."

"The good news is that Canadians recognize their role in maintaining their own health. They just need the nudge or incentive that can help them overcome the barriers of willpower, time and money," said Stuart Monteith, senior vice-president, group benefits, with Sun Life Financial Canada. "Employee workplace wellness programs are a proven way to lower these barriers and help empower employees to take positive action to improve their health."

As an employer, what are you doing to increase the health of your employees? Better yet, do you feel that it's your responsibility?