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# Study finds that wellness programs are effective when used correctly

Business First of Louisville

Despite the growing popularity of wellness programs at companies across the country, they won't work unless employers engage workers with gifts or other incentives to stay involved. At least that's the finding of a recent study by Guardian Life Insurance Co. of America.

According to a news release, the study found that nearly half of employees who have participated in wellness programs in the past three years said their commitment trailed off. However, 68 percent of workers said incentives, such as cash, gifts and extra vacation days, can help shore up the willpower to adopt healthier behaviors such as exercising, eating properly and kicking their smoking habits.

And the good news for employers using wellness programs to improve the health of their workers is that 85 percent of those enrolled in such programs said they are "very effective in promoting good health," the release said.

However, only 35 percent of employees who took the survey have access to wellness programs at their workplaces. And half of those who do have access are not enrolled in a wellness program.

"Workplace-based wellness programs are growing in popularity with employers, largely to promote prevention and early intervention as a means to help control the cost of health care," Tim Bireley, vice president of group medical at Guardian. "With only a third of employees reporting that wellness programs are available at their jobs, employers and the benefits industry have to do a better job of increasing awareness about these programs. There is also an enormous opportunity to educate small and mid-size business owners about the benefits of wellness initiatives."