



## Wearable Wellness Technology

Wearable wellness technology can be as simple as a pedometer used to count steps, or as complex as technology currently being designed and tested by Google's research unit, Google X, that aims to detect and destroy blood cancer cells. There are wristbands that look like jewelry, watches that track sleep patterns, clothing that monitors heart rate and even smart contact lenses that will someday automatically test blood sugar levels of a patient with diabetes. Whatever the device, one thing is for sure, wearable wellness technology isn't a fad. It is a growing billion-dollar industry with an exciting future.

The wearable wellness tech market was estimated to be worth \$2 billion in 2011. It is predicted to reach \$6 billion by the end of 2016. IMS Research recently reported the rise in wearables from 14 million devices shipped in 2011 to an estimate of 171 million devices to be shipped by the end of 2016. And while only 16% of the U.S. adult population used some sort of wearable technology in 2015, that number is predicted to increase to more than 33% by 2019.

### What does this mean for employers?

Wearable wellness technology has great promise and opportunity for employer wellness programs. Wearables can be personalized to set and track individual goals and they can continuously measure important metrics such as blood pressure or calories burned. The ease of use and accessibility of data made possible by these wearables allow employers to inject fun and competition into once-dull wellness programs. Additionally, wearables foster community and social support as individuals are able to establish networks for accountability and encouragement. For the employer, the technology offers a measurement paradise complete with data aggregation to monitor progress, quantify program outcomes and offer all types of incentives.

### "Cool" comes at a cost.

Although wearables have the "cool" factor that can attract participation, they can also significantly increase the price tag of your wellness program. Besides the initial cost, another factor to consider is the rate of long-term adoption. Research shows that 1/3 of consumers who owned a wearable wellness device discontinued using it after only 6 months.

What's the bottom line? Wearables can play a significant role in your wellness program; however, to truly reap the rewards you must have a strategy for implementation that is purposeful and includes meaningful and sustained employee engagement. This level of planning is critical to the success of any wellness program, including one that includes tools such as wearable wellness technology.

### Other risks to consider.

If you include wearables in your wellness program, there will be some legal issues to consider. Various employment laws and workplace regulations have potential to impact your strategies and processes related to wearables. In this new age of BYOD (Bring Your Own Device), employers face new challenges specific to privacy and security - for employees and for the company. You should review, and potentially revamp, your company's policies regarding social media and social technologies, as wearable wellness falls into these categories.

At the end of the day, wearable wellness technology is an excellent tool to enhance a company's wellness program. However, to borrow some words from Sir Winston Churchill, those without a plan (a business plan that purposefully incorporates wearable wellness technology), will plan to fail.

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