

Healthwatch

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OZFACT

Stress-related claims by workers cost businesses more than \$200 million every year

'After everyone had their massage, the place was humming'

Workplace reform

MASSAGE, yoga, tai chi, meditation and martial arts are all in a day's work for growing numbers of employees.

Workplaces are increasingly incorporating therapies aimed at improving the mental, emotional and physical health of staff into the working week.

Australian Association of Massage Therapy president Geoff Waldron said corporate massage had gained popularity over the last six years, as more workplaces realised the value of improving staff health and wellbeing.

He said massage created body awareness and enhanced alertness, blood flow and joint flexibility, while reducing muscle tension and stress.

"If you feel better, you work better," Mr Waldron said.

The association recently ran a six-week trial with freight company Toll Ipec to measure the benefits of massage.

Call centre staff who had massages reported a 38 per cent fall in neck, shoulder or

Kamahl Cogdon

arm pain, and a 14 per cent reduction in headaches.

There was also a 27 per cent reduction in reported lack of productivity and 78 per cent cut in lapses of concentration.

"Each Wednesday after everyone had their massage, the place was humming," call centre team leader Ashley Bone said.

Azure Training and Development chief executive Michael Patishman has seen similar improvements in workplaces where his company has run its stress management courses.

With an East-meets-West approach, the courses use elements of yoga, tai chi, karate, meditation and breathing and visualisation exercises to improve the stress management skills and wellbeing of staff.

Mr Patishman said workplaces, including IBM, legal firm Minter Ellison and the Department of Infrastructure, had seen rises of 14 per cent in productivity, 10 per cent in physical wellbeing and 15 per cent in mental wellbeing.



In office hours: masseuses can treat staff at their desks.

He said corporations were becoming more open-minded about their role in improving the health and happiness of staff.

"It's an employees' market, so employers have to attract good people and

find ways of retaining their own people," he said.

"To make matters worse, baby boomers are retiring, and with them their worth ethic.

"New generations of X and Y have very different views.

In fact, the catchcry of generation Y is, 'I've got a life, make me happy or I'll leave'."

Mr Waldron said most corporations in which massages were offered subsidised the service for staff.

He said many therapists

brought their own massage table or chair to a workplace but others performed massages on staff at their desks.

Mr Waldron said a 10 to 15-minute massage once a week could deliver benefits to staff stuck at desks and performing repetitive tasks.

"Massage is cumulative," he said.

"The first massage might feel good for a day and the second one might feel good for two or three days or even a week and the third one might be two or three weeks.

"From then on, you can begin to push out the frequency of your massages."

A survey on the health of Australia's workforce last year highlighted the cost benefit of a healthy workforce.

The survey, by Medibank Private, found healthy workers were almost three times more productive than unhealthy employees.

And unhealthy workers took up to nine times more sick leave than their healthy colleagues.

The survey found poor employee health and absenteeism costs businesses \$7 billion annually.