

THE WEEK

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SMART *life*

LIVE HEALTHY, STAY FIT

TO BANK OR
NOT TO BANK?
THE BIG
STEM CELL
DEBATE

WHEN
CORPORATES
GET WORKOUT
WISE

HOOKED
ON HIIT?
DON'T MISS
THE DIET!

ALL ABOUT
NUTRITION
LABELS

BIPASHA BASU
HER BODY LOGIC





Participants get ready for Stegathlon, a 10,000 steps-a-day virtual race around the world

Fit at work

Online communities, fitness programmes, gyms in the premises... corporate India is doing everything possible to keep employees hale and hearty

BY SWAGATA YADAVAR

One are the days when companies cared only about targets and performances of their employees. While they still care about those, they also realise a healthy employee is a productive one. It is not surprising then that those companies are initiating programmes with employee health in mind. Health fitness programmes, lectures by lifestyle consultants, sports events, a gym in the premises and fitness challenges, corporate India is leaving no stone unturned to encourage the idea of staying fit among its employees.

Boosting productivity

"Leadership has realised that one way to increase bottom lines is to protect and provide for their most important asset—human capital," says Ravi Krishnan, CEO, Stopathika, a corporate initiative that encourages employees to take 10,000 steps a day. "It is very important as it conveys to the employees that the organisation is as much interested in the health of its employees as it is interested in their work performance," says Jaya Alexander, chief human resources, Geojit BNP Paribas Financial Services Ltd. She echoes the sentiments of human resource teams in most companies who know that an employee who is fit is more likely to

be regular, consistent and more motivated. In fact, a study conducted by Leeds Metropolitan University in the UK showed that six out of 10 employees said that their time management skills, mental performance and ability to meet deadlines improved on the days they exercised. There was also an increase of 15 per cent in their overall performance and these employees were home feeling more satisfied with their days.

Most corporates are encouraging initiatives that will create awareness about fitness by inviting fitness experts or trainers to give talks to their employees. Saba Rajjournal, Pilates instructor and MD, Core Method, a fitness studio in Bangalore, who has worked with several companies for employee fitness says she curates fitness programmes to suit the needs of the employees of a company. "We identify work patterns of the particular company and only then suggest modifications. Our main focus is to create awareness and educate people," she says.

Increased accessibility

Identifying the needs of the client is the key, agree most fitness experts. "Not having enough time", is the most common excuse an employee gives to skip exercising. So, most companies

prefer to have gym facilities in their own premises. "Now that most companies are moving in to big spaces, it is possible for them to have a gym in their premises and to allow employees to access it at their convenience," says Abhishek Sharma, yoga expert and author of *Fitness on the Go*.

Adrika Shetty, assistant manager, marketing of fitness chain Fitness First, says that in the last one year alone, many companies have approached them for tie-ups. "We initially conduct demo sessions in the company premises, usually in their cafeteria or their terrace, before tying up with them," she says. According to her, it is the demos and the word of mouth that work. "When they know their colleagues have joined in and are enjoying the sessions, many want to enrol," she says.

For those who do not prefer gyms, they have other fitness routines like *Muay Thai*, mixed martial arts, body combat, kickboxing and dance. Accessibility is a key aspect, she says. Employees are motivated to work out if the gym is close to their offices. So who pays—the company or the employee? "Till now, we have had corporates coming to us for discounted packages for their employees but it's the employee who pays for his membership," she says.



Virtual reality

Companies are finding new ways to discuss health with their employees and one of the innovative ways is to have a health web page for their employees on their intranet. "It is easy to discuss, talk and interact with employees on a web page," says Suba. In the page she has designed for a company, she discusses different body types and the need to choose the right exercise for the right body type. There is a questionnaire to help them find out their body type and information on what would suit them. Health tips and trends can be easily discussed on a web page and it also reminds employees to take care of their health.

Walk the talk

A fitness initiative that has been enthusiastically taken up by corporates across India is Stepathlon. It is a pedometer-based initiative that motivates individuals to take 10,000 steps a day, as recommended by global health authorities. It is a virtual race for 100 days where employees in teams compete with teams within and outside their companies. "Logically, walking is the simplest solution to incorporate sustainable activity into our daily routines. This led to the idea of a race around the world via a dynamic and information-rich virtual map. The virtual aspect enabled the initiative to become more inclusive and easily accessible," says Ravi.

A sports enthusiast and former sportsperson, Ravi started Stepathlon with partner Shane Bildeerough, an international nutrition and fitness expert, who had successfully implemented the programme in Australia. When it started in 2012, Stepathlon had 143 companies participating. In 2013, they had 210 companies including Godrej Properties, Titan Industries, Aditya Birla Group, Capgemini and MakeMyTrip participating with over 30,000 employees.

Team work is one of the factors that makes Stepathlon a success. "Research shows that people are more likely to



Stepathlon participants from JTV Martials, Pune

stick with exercise/wellness activity if they are in teams. Having the support of teammates can be decisive in catalysing behavioural change. The healthy competitive element is also a great motivator," says Ravi. Stepathletes can track their team's position on the

map in relation to other teams within their company and other participating companies across the world on the "Stepathlon/Company leader board".

Healthy footprint

Standard Chartered Mumbai

Work-life balance programme for employees at Geojit BNP Paribas Financial Services Ltd

