



# Pilates for Employee Health and Wellness

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## **CORRELATION OF EMPLOYEE HEALTH AND WELLNESS AND BUSINESS PROFITABILITY AND COSTS**

As a sweeping statement it can be said that at the beginning of each financial year and then at regular intervals a business sets out and reviews goals and targets, both short term and long term, including Financial targets and productivity goals. In order for these goals and targets to be reached a business needs productive, healthy and engaged employees. Unfortunately, this is not necessarily what a business has.

A recent study by Singapore General Hospital on the prevalence of musculoskeletal disorders among office workers in Singapore found that over 73% of those surveyed reported experiencing pain in at least one part of their body with Neck, Shoulder and Lower Back ranking the highest.

In fact, according to a 2017 Glaxo Smith Klein report Singapore ranks among the highest in the world for body and head pain. With 85% of Singaporean respondents reporting they experienced pain and four in ten of this number reporting that they suffer body pain every week.

Dr Yeo Sow Nam, Director of The Pain Specialist at Mount Elizabeth Hospital has identified that; "In the general population, persistent head and body pain may be due to an unhealthy lifestyle. For instance, high stress levels, anxiety, sleep issues, muscle tension, poor posture and consuming too much caffeine and alcohol could trigger pain."

*"...lower productivity levels are estimated to cost the local economy S\$8.4 billion each year."*

A substantial amount of research has provided evidence of associations between musculoskeletal disorders and certain work-related factors such as vibration, posture, force and repetition. "In an office environment, poor posture and the prolonged sedentary work seem key factors." Says Senior Principal Occupational Therapist, Patrick Ter, from the Occupational Therapy Department at Singapore General Hospital.

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As well as the effects of stress that put a body into a state of tension and can impair sleep simply sitting at a desk and working at a computer can have detrimental effects on the body. Office workers can spend upwards of eight hours a day doing the same thing – many of them sitting in front of a computer which can create muscle imbalances. These imbalances can lead to back pain, neck strain, repetitive strain injury and other postural issues which in turn can lead to more sick days being taken and less productivity.

**The Glaxo Smith Klein Global Pain Index Survey revealed that Singapore workers took an average of 3 days sick leave due to pain alone in the past 12 months.**

Those who worked through their pain were 15% less productive and these missed days and lower productivity levels are estimated to cost the local economy S\$8.4billion each year. In addition, stress-induced illnesses and exhaustion are lead contributors to productivity losses.

An estimated 75% of business's healthcare costs pays for treating preventable disorders. This figure is even more significant when you consider that Singapore's medical inflation rate was 15% last year and healthcare costs continue to rise year on year.

**CORPORATE WELLNESS PROGRAMMES**

As awareness of the correlation between stress and disease grows deeper and as our cultural understanding of the correlation between wellness and performance increases there is an increase in companies around the world investing in corporate wellness programs. What was once a luxury employee benefit offered by a select group of organizations is now being viewed more and more as a strategic necessity. A new corporate culture in which quality of life and increased vitality are integral in creating a positive work experience is emerging.

According to an article in the Singapore Business Review; "Singaporean workers ranked wellness programmes – such as on-site fitness centres, health club memberships and stress reduction programmes – as one of the most important health and wellness work-life elements. In terms of productivity, employees of organisations with effective wellness programmes are twice as likely to outperform their peers financially, with per employee revenue improving by up to 50%."

**A study by the Singapore National Employers Federation has shown that for every dollar of investment in a workplace health and wellness programme, companies reaped an average return of S\$1.68.**

Additionally, organisations with effective wellness programmes are 50% more likely to report lower turnover rates in comparison to their competitors.

By making health and wellness a priority, businesses are able to not only encourage and support their employees but boost productivity, improve employee retention, reduce healthcare costs and boost long term profitability.

*"...organisations with effective wellness programmes are twice as likely to outperform their peers financially, with per employee revenue improving by up to 50%."*



Take up of corporate wellness programmes, however, seems very dependent on how relevant and easy they are. There is no “one size fits all” approach and businesses need to engage with employees to ensure a programme fits easily into daily life, that the programme is aligned with company culture and employee needs. A tailored corporate wellness programme may include a number of different initiatives, but one exercise found to particularly improve the health and wellness of a workforce is Pilates.

Pilates also slowly moves muscles through their full range, dynamically stretching to ease the discomfort caused by muscle tension and imbalance. Pilates movements that focus on strengthening muscles will build a balanced and coordinated body through the whole chain from neck, shoulder and upper back down to the tips of fingers. Core control and strengthening of the core muscles improves and supports the joints when in motion as well as when sitting, helping to stop the body from slouching into an incorrect posture.

**Pilates requires focus to gain control of the body and its movements, this mindful control and focus develops concentration and has been found to reduce stress hormone levels within the body.**

In addition, Pilates teaches controlled breathing techniques which not only support the body's movements but can be used as part of a mindful meditation to calm anxiety and stress and release body tension.

Pilates has the flexibility to be conducted in a number of different ways dependent on the needs of a client. Pilates can be conducted as group classes either in a studio or brought to a client's office location. Pilates classes can be tailored to the specific exercise needs of a group.

Desk Pilates can be taught so that employees can take themselves through a range of specific stretching and strengthening exercises.

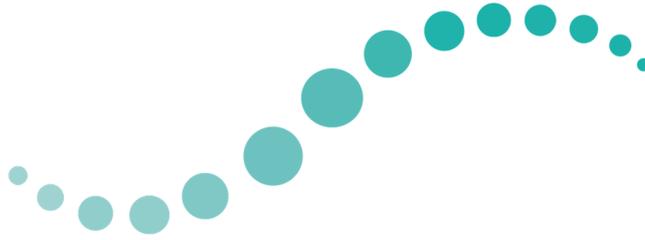
Additionally, Pilates can be offered as rehabilitation for injury or to help correct a musculoskeletal disorder and this may include using the Pilates specific range of equipment.

*Pilates is a proven mind-body exercise that teaches body awareness, can relieve muscle tension, correct body alignment and strengthen the body against injury as well as help to relieve stress.*

The human body is designed to be active, moving in all planes, it is not designed to sit for long periods of time. Static sitting postures can cause patterns of tightness in the muscles and stiffness in the joints. Poorly supported sitting positions can cause postural and structural issues such as kyphosis, lordosis or scoliosis.

Pilates takes the spine and joints of the arms and legs gently through their available motion and can help to counteract the problems encountered from sitting all day.

Stiffened joints slowly start to release and improve joint range. Joints are moved into the range where they are stiff to gradually ease out the tightness and create more supple joints with less pain.



Carolyn Lam, Senior Consultant at the National Health Centre, says "It takes 66 days to form a habit. If one can motivate groups to work together within that period, the health impact will be visible within three months."

Joseph Pilates, the creator and founder of the Pilates Method said, "**In 10 session you'll feel the difference, in 20 sessions you'll see the difference and in 30 sessions you'll have a whole new body.**"

With this in mind, it won't be long before a business starts to see a return on their investment into a Wellness programme.

## BODY N'SYNC

Body n'Sync is one provider in Singapore already working with a number of corporate clients as part of their wellness programmes.

Body n'Sync is a Pilates, Therapy and Wellness studio based right in the heart of the Singapore Central Business District.

Body n'Sync provide a range of services, including:

- Group Pilates Mat Classes (in the studio and on location in client facilities)
- Group Equipment Classes
- Private Pilates sessions
- Muscle Release Therapy
- Corporate Wellness Workshops

Corporate Wellness Workshops conducted by Body n'Sync can be tailored to the requirements of a business and may include:

- Body alignment and back care education
- Workstation ergonomics and posture
- Desk based Pilates
- Functional Pilates group class
- Team building Pilates group class

Body n'Sync work with clients to create a tailored corporate package that meets the needs of their employees, helping to make the wellness programme relevant and easy to participate in.

Contact Body n'Sync to find out more about how to incorporate Pilates into your Corporate Wellness Programme.

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