

4 Ways Habit Change Providers are Transforming Employee Health

The Whole Person Approach Enriches Mental Health, Resiliency, and Human Performance While Preventing, Reversing, and Slowing the Progression of Chronic Disease



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The instances of chronic disease have skyrocketed over the past decade, reaching epidemic proportions. In tandem, the number of people at risk of developing a chronic disease has also grown significantly—especially during the COVID-19 pandemic with social isolation, stress eating, inactivity, and mental health issues. Decreasing weight, eating more nutritious food, and exercising more are key to improving the health of those with a chronic disease as well as those at risk of developing one. However, physicians are challenged — just telling a patient to eat less and exercise more does not often lead to actual health improvement. The alternative becomes a cocktail of medications and, when the disease escalates, more invasive action. The costs to the individual, the employer, and the healthcare industry is enormous. Chronic diseases cost the US more than \$3.8 trillion annually, nearly 20% of our nation’s GDP.¹ The cost to employers is a significant burden on their bottom line.

Impact of Chronic Disease on Employers

\$1 trillion

Economic impact of employees with unaddressed chronic disease.²

60%

Increase in costs for employees with metabolic syndrome.³

\$36.4 Billion

Employer costs related to reduced productivity due to absenteeism caused by chronic health conditions.⁴

Habit Change Providers and the Whole-Person Approach

Self-insured employers and payers have traditionally sought to manage the growing costs of an increasingly sicker workforce through condition management programs, weight loss programs, gym memberships, and digital solutions such as activity trackers and wellness platforms. While this approach may achieve participation in the beginning, they fail to deliver long-lasting health improvements.

Habit change providers take a different approach—an integrated “whole-person” approach. This method focuses on supporting habit changes that lead to preventing, reversing, and slowing the progression of chronic disease. An essential part of that focus is enhancing mental health, resilience, and human performance.

The following are four ways habit change providers and their whole-person approach are more effective than traditional programs in bringing long-term results.

¹ <https://www.fiercehealthcare.com/hospitals-health-systems/fitch-rain>

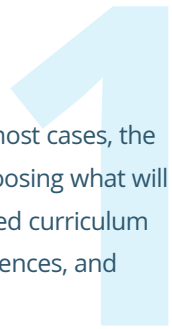
² <https://www.fightchronicdisease.org/latest-news/milken-institute-study-chronic-disease-costs-us-economy-more-1-trillion-annually>

³ <https://www.ajmc.com/view/the-controversial-question-of-metabolic-syndrome>

⁴ <https://www.cdc.gov/chronicdisease/resources/publications/factsheets/workplace-health.htm>

One Size Fits One

Traditional health offerings are typically designed around a standardized learning and education model. In most cases, the content and approach are the same for every participant and they work through a program. Finding and choosing what will work for them is left up to the individual. With a habit change provider, each participant receives a customized curriculum and experience based on their unique needs, medical history, social determinants of health, personal preferences, and lifestyle. This can include genetic testing to further refine the experience that's best for them.



Standard Learning and Education Model VS Habit Change Providers



Standard Learning and Education Model



Habit Change Providers

Genetics

Genes that make up our DNA are the building blocks of life. They provide the instructions that make our bodies function. They can also explain, in part, why so many traditional health improvement programs fail. For example, research has found that genes can influence an individual's predisposition for being overweight by as much as 80%.⁵



Genes That Influence Health

BDNF Gene	DRD2 Gene	MC4R Gene	FTO Gene
Determines resilience to stress ⁶	Regulates dopamine, appetite, growth hormone ⁷	Regulates satiation response ⁸	Determines how the body breaks down fat ⁹
Decreased levels of BDNF are implicated in: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Anxiety and depression Impaired mental cognition Neurodegenerative diseases 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Induces cravings Creates feelings of pleasure and satisfaction Influences addiction Influences development of severe obesity 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Influences appetite Induces overeating Significantly impacts obesity 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Implicated in body mass index Increases odds of obesity Combined with MC4R, FTO further increases the risk of obesity, as well as type 2 diabetes

⁵ <https://www.health.harvard.edu/staying-healthy/why-people-become-overweight> ⁶ <https://elifesciences.org/articles/15092>
⁷ <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/8260195/> ⁸ <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/31954858/> ⁹ <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/17434869/>

Understanding genetic factors enables habit change providers to create personalized programs that help individuals overcome their genetic predispositions. These include things like eating more slowly or having smaller meals more often, increasing healthy fats and proteins, reducing salt and sugar, or lowering stress through meditation and walking. In other words, the focus becomes everyday habits that bring lifetime improvements.

“

30% of a person’s likelihood of premature death is due to **genetic factors**.¹⁰



Mental Health

According to a survey conducted by Kaiser Family Foundation, 54% of adults in the US say the pandemic has negatively impacted their mental health.¹¹ The number of adults experiencing anxiety or depression has quadrupled since the start of the pandemic.¹² More than 13% say they’ve started or increased substance use as a way to cope.¹³ The effect of social distancing—physical activity, weight gain, increased stress, and loneliness, all play a part. These are all lifestyle risk factors that impact mental health—even in good times.

Eating Habits and Mental Health¹⁴

- A diet high in refined sugar impairs brain function and worsens mood disorders like depression.
- 95% of serotonin—the “feel good” hormone—is produced in the gastrointestinal tract.
- “Good” intestinal bacteria reduces inflammation and activates neural pathways between the gut and the brain.

Exercise Habits and Mental Health¹⁵

- Reduces anxiety and depression
- Elevates mood
- Improves self-esteem
- Alleviates social withdrawal

Habit change providers understand the interconnectedness of mental health, physical health, well-being, and resilience. This is critical for addressing the challenges brought about by the pandemic as the negative habits that have built up over the past year aren’t going to magically disappear once the pandemic has ended. The whole-person approach can help individuals replace those negative habits with positive ones, thereby reducing the long-term impact of the pandemic on mental health.

¹⁰ <https://www.nejm.org/doi/full/10.1056/NEJMsa073350>

¹¹ <https://www.kff.org/coronavirus-covid-19/issue-brief/the-implications-of-covid-19-for-mental-health-and-substance-use/>

¹² <https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/covid19/pulse/mental-health.htm>

¹³ <https://www.kff.org/coronavirus-covid-19/issue-brief/the-implications-of-covid-19-for-mental-health-and-substance-use/>

¹⁴ <https://www.health.harvard.edu/blog/nutritional-psychiatry-your-brain-on-food-201511168626>

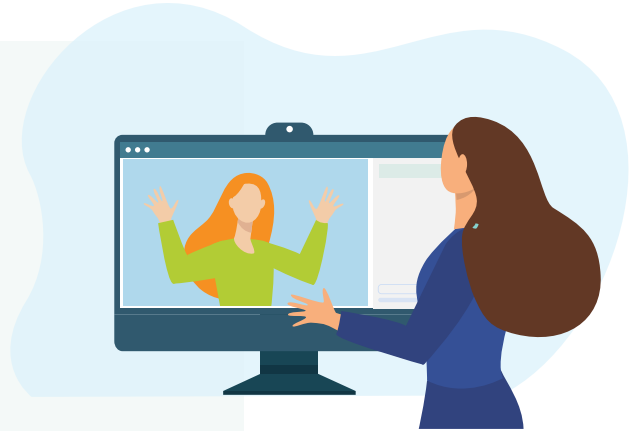
¹⁵ <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC1470658/#11523-5998-8-2-106-b1>

Coaching and Accountability

Many traditional health and well-being programs offer weekly support groups or text support, the latter of which may be an AI-based chatbot. Habit change providers are different in that they provide dedicated virtual health coaches for every participant. Participants and coaches, who are matched based on personality and preferences, meet on a regular basis. This helps hold participants accountable and gives them the ongoing personal support, inspiration, and encouragement they need to achieve their goals.

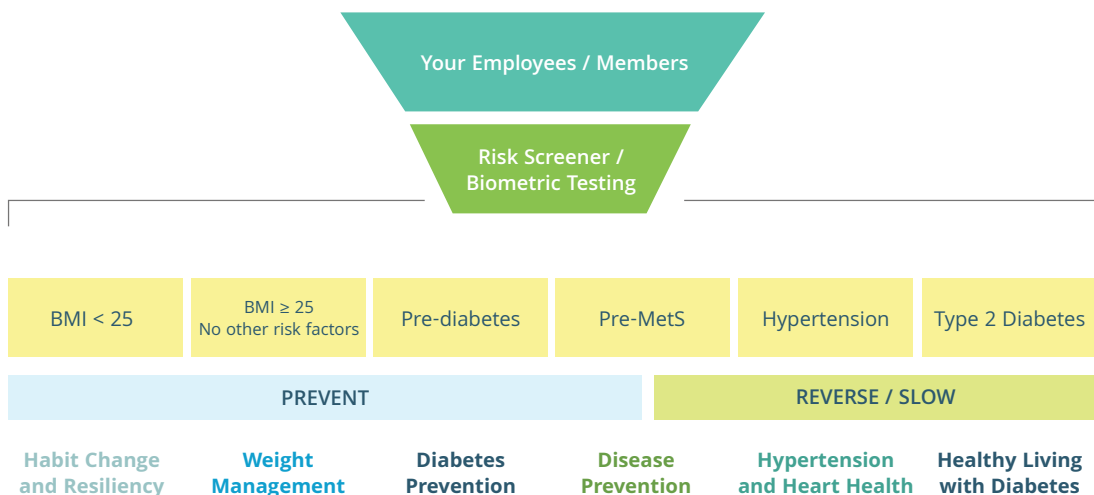


According to the American Psychological Association, **“Having someone with whom to share your struggles and successes makes the work easier and the mission less intimidating.”**¹⁶



Success in Action

Newtopia is a tech-enabled habit change provider that has helped thousands of individuals live healthier lives and Fortune 500 companies significantly reduce costs. A partnership with Newtopia begins by measuring the client’s employee population risk through existing biometric screening data, claims data, or an online risk screener. Newtopia then stratifies the population to identify how best to intervene. Based on their identified risk factors, employees are assigned to either a broad-based disease prevention program or an individualized program focused on diabetes prevention, weight management, hypertension and heart health, or healthy living with diabetes.



¹⁶ <https://www.apa.org/topics/lifestyle-changes>

Newtopia tailors interventions based on each individual's goals, genes, medical history, motivation, social determinants of health, and personality. Participants are also assigned an Inspirator (health coach). Inspirators are matched to the individual based on personality and preferences. While Inspirators provide accountability, long-term engagement is supported with digital tools such as connected devices and an interactive app.

The Newtopia Program



Weight Loss During the Pandemic

The pandemic has been difficult in so many ways. In the midst of the pandemic, many have gained weight. One survey conducted in February 2021 found that the majority of those surveyed reported having experienced an undesirable change in their weight, with 42% having said to have gained weight.¹⁷

However, Newtopia participants have had a different experience. The internal study of 2020 results included participants who were engaged for at least 12 months beginning pre-pandemic January or February 2020. Participants with two or more metabolic risk factors were invited to participate in the habit change experience. The risk factors included obesity (body mass index over 28), hypertension, type 2 diabetes, high triglyceride levels, and out-of-range cholesterol levels. We chose to focus on weight change, as it is a proxy for metabolic risk improvement. The percentage of participants achieving a minimum of 4.3% weight reduction after 12 months was assessed. This threshold has been shown in previous research to be associated with a reduction in healthcare costs.¹⁸ In addition, the average weight loss and the percentage of clinically obese participants dropping a BMI class level were also assessed.

2020 COVID-19 Internal Study Results

Obesity is linked to increased risk of serious complications and costly medical utilization, exacerbated by Covid-19

Participants	Female	Male	Average Age
1436	52%	48%	46.5(±10.6)

- 77% of participants **lost weight**.
- 44% of participants had a **weight loss** of >4.3%.
- Average **weight loss** was 4.2% (p<.0001).
- 22% of obese participants **dropped a BMI category** at 12 months.

This was a retrospective data analysis of participants who were engaged for 12 months beginning pre-pandemic. This analysis focused on weight change and was restricted to those participants with a body mass index >=28. The percentage of participants with a >= 4.3% weight reduction after 12 months was assessed. This has been shown to be associated with meaningful reduction in healthcare costs. The average weight loss and the percentage BMI decrease was also assessed.

Even during the pandemic when lifestyles have been dramatically disrupted, meaningful and impactful health improvements can be achieved. The benefits are both clinically and financially significant to individuals, employers, and healthcare systems.

¹⁷ <https://www.apa.org/news/press/releases/stress/2021/march-weight-change> ¹⁸ <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/26474447>

A Better Approach

Employers have seen firsthand that traditional employee health and well-being offerings fall short. Habit change providers like Newtopia are changing that dynamic by offering solutions that go beyond standard prevention and condition management programs. Their whole-person approach improves mental health, resilience, and human performance while preventing, reversing, and slowing the progression of chronic disease while significantly reducing medical costs for employers. It's a new approach that actually works.

