

How To Design Well-Being Incentives That Work

Incentives and rewards are often paired with employer well-being strategies to jumpstart motivation and help short-term actions turn into lasting healthy habits.



Incentives

An **incentive** is any desirable object that an individual anticipates for the completion of a behavior.

Rewards

A **reward** is any desirable object that an individual receives after completing a behavior.

Incentives → Rewards

Incentives can turn into rewards. For example, an employee is told that they will receive an annual gym membership (an incentive) if they register for their employer's well-being program. After they register, they receive the gym membership (the reward).

WebMD Health Services' Research-Backed Best Practices

01

Reward High-Impact Activities

Give the strongest rewards for the actions most likely to change behavior long-term, such as platform registration, health assessment completion, one-on-one coaching and wellness challenge participation.

02

Communicate Incentives Effectively

Make the connection between action and reward crystal clear: "Do X → Get Y." Start messaging before launch and reinforce throughout the year with reminders.

03

Use the Right Type of Incentive

Whenever possible, offer diverse and flexible incentives so employees can choose what motivates them, and frame them as gains (bonuses) rather than discounts. We recommend against imposing penalties for non-participation.

04

Deliver Rewards Effectively

Shorten the time between action and reward with digital delivery and automated fulfillment, as immediate rewards strengthen the behavior → reward link and increase redemption satisfaction.

Design a Strategy That Builds True Well-Being

[Contact us](#) to discuss a tailored approach for your organization.