

# Challenges and Opportunities for Preventing Depression in the Workplace: A Review of the Evidence Supporting Workplace Factors and Interventions

This literature review explores the existing scientific evidence for prevention of depression in the workplace. Seminal articles highlighting workplace factors and interventions for preventing depression in the workplace are highlighted. Much of the evidence base for primary and secondary depression prevention strategies remains a work in progress, nevertheless, the literature does provide guidance for employers. The need for population screening for depression should be evaluated based on numbers of employees at risk or, alternatively, screening can be limited to high risk subgroups. Both organizational factors and individual interventions should be considered. Organizational approaches have less evidence supporting specific interventions but several worker stress models (e.g., demand-control; effort-reward) have linked high worker stress with increased psychological problems. Organizational interventions could include strategies to reduce worker stress, improve mental health literacy and promote work-life balance. Individual interventions could include promoting protective factors, general healthy lifestyle habits, improvement of mental health literacy and access to early interventions and therapies. Employers should be aware of mental health benefits structures to minimize employee cost for mental health medical interventions. The value of depression prevention can be demonstrated by linking prevention strategies with other administrative databases including short-term disability, absenteeism, employee turnover or health risk appraisal psychosocial indicators (i.e., job satisfaction, stress, self-reported perception of health).

## Reference:

Couser GP. Challenges and Opportunities for Preventing Depression in the Workplace: A Review of the Evidence Supporting Workplace Factors and Interventions. *Journal of Occupational and Environmental Medicine*. 2008;50:411-427.

Primary and secondary prevention strategies by employers and employees can reduce the incidence and impact of depression in the workplace

- Primary prevention of depression requires multidimensional strategies to reduce modifiable risk factors, improve protective factors, increase mental health literacy and enhance mental health promotion
- Secondary prevention requires early detection of mental health symptoms and effective interventions
- The evidence base for interventions that promote primary and secondary prevention of depression are a work in progress, nevertheless, the scientific literature does provide guidance to employers

## Employer Strategies to Prevent Depression:

- Decrease worker stress
- Clear job descriptions
- Better work design
- Joint employee-management committees
- Child and elder care options
- Career training/enhancement opportunities
- Job demands/rewards balance
- Enhance employee work-life balance
- Promote mental health literacy
- Review mental health plan benefits
- Consider depression screening and offer mental health interventions
- Demonstrate value by integration with productivity metrics

## Employee Strategies to Prevent Depression:

- Build protective factors
- Coping skills
- Resilience training
- Stress management
- Social support
- Promote general good health habits including nutrition, sleep and exercise
- Enhance mental health literacy
- Participate in mental health promotion including depression screening
- Enhance mental health self-management skills
- Seek early interventions for mental health symptoms
- Use cognitive behavior therapy approaches