

Employers Find Healthy Food Program Is Good for You

Humana and Wal-Mart team up to offer employees an incentive to make better dietary choices.

Organizations are teaming up to put their money where their mouths are, offering discounts on a wide array of healthy foods.

A partnership between insurer Humana Inc. subsidiary HumanaVitality and Wal-Mart Stores Inc. is allowing employers to join the Vitality HealthyFood program, which gives plan participants a 5 percent rebate when they purchase foods at the retail giant that are marked with the Great for You label.

One organization signing up for the program is the 275,000-member Kentucky Employees' Health Plan, which includes teachers, state employees, employees of local quasi-governmental agencies and retirees. The aim is to encourage plan members and their families to make better dietary choices to ultimately help improve their health.

"The choices we make, especially with health care, to a large extent define who we are," says Timothy Longmeyer, secretary of the commonwealth of Kentucky's Personnel Cabinet. The cabinet is responsible for issues such as personnel administration, payroll and benefits.

Joe Woods, CEO of HumanaVitality, says the Louisville, Kentucky-based insurer launched its HumanaVitality program as a way to encourage those insured through Humana to make healthy choices when it comes to fitness and nutrition. Participants who opt into the program receive points for doing healthy things, such as losing weight and being active, and the points can be exchanged for rewards such as movie tickets. The Vitality HealthyFood program was an outgrowth of that.

Kentucky Employees' Health Plan has been a member of the HumanaVitality program for a year and added HealthyFood to the mix on Jan. 1. Plan participants complete a health assessment and then receive a HealthyFood card.

When they shop at Wal-Mart and purchase products with the Good for You label, an amount equal to 5 percent of the purchase price is loaded onto the card, and that money can be used for any future Wal-Mart purchases, not just food, Woods says. Money is added to the card every time a person makes a Good for You purchase.

Humana chose to partner with Wal-Mart because the two companies already work together on various health initiatives, Woods says, and Wal-Mart is the largest grocer in the nation.

About 1,300 Wal-Mart items, including lean meats, produce and low-fat dairy products, bear the Good for You label. The products go through a review process by nutritional experts from public- and private-sector organizations, Woods says.

Through the products that bear that label, “people can really start to build on their understanding of nutrition,” Woods says.

And price is a key concern, according to a survey done for Share Our Strength, which works to wipe out childhood hunger. [*It's Dinnertime: A Report on Low-Income Families' Efforts to Plan, Shop for and Cook Healthy Meals*](#), released last year, surveyed 1,500 low- and middle-income families with at least one child at home about healthy food choices.

Respondents cited price as the main obstacle to healthy eating, and only 30 percent were satisfied with the price of healthy foods. With the 5 percent discount, HumanaVitality is hoping more people will opt for nutritious choices, Woods says.

Longmeyer says Kentucky Employees' Health Plan joined the push for wellness and improved health about five years ago. Those who are part of HumanaVitality can then opt to join HealthyFood at no extra cost.

Because so many health issues, such as obesity, diabetes, back pain, high blood pressure and heart disease, can be tied to nutrition, it's a key concern for the commonwealth and its employees. “In Kentucky we're dealing with a lot of issues regarding our nutritional habits,” Longmeyer says. “This is a great way to encourage people to eat better and live better.”