



IAG Report 1/2014

„Think of me. Love, your back“

A survey of back health and prevention culture in companies

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Denk
an mich
Dein Rücken

„Think of me. Love, your back“ is a prevention campaign run by the German Social Accident Insurance Institutions for trade and industry, for the public sector and for agriculture, forestry and landscaping, and by the Knappschaft. The aim of the campaign is to reduce work related back stress.

Further information:
www.deinruecken.de

Abstract

Back pain is regarded as the Nr. 1 most common ailment. The back is particularly exposed to strain at work or at school.



As part of the prevention campaign “Think of me. Love, your back” the Institute for Work and Health of the German Social Accident Insurance (IAG) surveyed about 2,600 employees and 1,600 company owners about the status quo of “Preventing Back Strain” in companies. In addition, around 800 OSH specialists (members of the German Association for Safety, Health and Environmental Protection at Work) were asked for their assessment of the situation in companies.

Main topics of the survey were ergonomic features, the prevention culture in companies, health literacy of employees, the content of the risk assessment (physical and psychological stressors, age-appropriate job design) and the supply and use of health-promotion services.

The results of these surveys are summarised in the following report. They are helping to adapt information material, consulting services and other activities to the specific needs of companies.

Zusammenfassung

Rückenerkrankungen gelten als Volkskrankheit Nummer 1. Besonders bei der Arbeit oder in der Schule ist der Rücken vielen Belastungen ausgesetzt.



Das Institut für Arbeit und Gesundheit der Deutschen Gesetzlichen Unfallversicherung (IAG) hat daher im Rahmen der Präventionskampagne „Denk an mich. Dein Rücken“ deutschlandweit rund 2.600 Beschäftigte, 1.600 Unternehmerinnen und Unternehmer sowie rund 800 Fachkräfte für Arbeitssicherheit zur aktuellen betrieblichen Situation in Bezug auf das Thema Rücken befragt. Themenschwerpunkte waren dabei die ergonomische Ausstattung, die Präventionskultur im Unternehmen bzw. Betrieb, die Gesundheitskompetenz der Beschäftigten, der Inhalt der Gefährdungsbeurteilung (körperliche und psychische Belastungen, altersgerechte Arbeitsplatzgestaltung) sowie Angebot und die Nutzung von Präventionsangeboten.

Die Ergebnisse der Befragungen sind in diesem IAG Report dargestellt. Sie können dabei unterstützen, Informationsmaterialien, Beratungen und andere Maßnahmen auf die spezifischen Bedürfnisse der Beschäftigten im jeweiligen Unternehmen oder Betrieb anzupassen.

Résumé

Le mal de dos est à présent devenu la maladie la plus répandue en Allemagne. Au travail ou à l'école en particulier, le dos est soumis à de nombreux efforts.



Dans le cadre de la campagne de prévention « Pense à moi. Ton dos », l'Institut du travail et de la santé de l'assurance sociale allemande des accidents (IAG) a donc mené une enquête dans toute l'Allemagne auprès d'environ 2 600 salariés, 1 600 entrepreneurs et d'environ 800 spécialistes de la sécurité au travail sur le thème du dos. Les questions se concentraient principalement sur l'équipement ergonomique, la culture de la prévention dans l'entreprise ou l'exploitation, la compétence en matière de santé des salariés, le contenu de l'évaluation des risques (contraintes physiques et psychiques, aménagement du poste de travail adapté à l'âge) ainsi que l'offre et l'utilisation des offres de prévention.

Ce rapport de l'IAG décrit les résultats de cette enquête qui pourraient contribuer à adapter les supports d'information, les conseils et autres mesures, aux besoins spécifiques des salariés dans leur entreprise ou exploitation.

Resumen

Las enfermedades de la espalda afectan a gran parte de la población y se encuentran entre las más extendidas. Especialmente en el trabajo o en la escuela, la espalda está sometida a mucha tensión y sobrecarga.



Como parte de la campaña de prevención "Piensa en mí, tu espalda", el Instituto de Trabajo y Salud de la Asociación Alemana de Seguros de Accidentes (IAG) ha realizado una encuesta a 2.600 empleados, 1.600 empresarios y 800 técnicos en salud y seguridad ocupacional en toda Alemania acerca de la situación actual en las empresas con respecto a los trastornos de espalda. Las prioridades temáticas eran el diseño ergonómico del puesto de trabajo, la cultura de prevención en las empresas, los conocimientos de los trabajadores sobre la prevención de riesgos laborales, los contenidos de la evaluación de riesgos (cargas físicas y psíquicas, adaptación del diseño del puesto de trabajo conforme a la edad) y la disponibilidad y utilización de medidas preventivas.

Los resultados de la encuesta se presentan en este informe de IAG. Pueden ayudar a adaptar el material de información, las consultas y otras medidas a las necesidades especiales de los trabajadores en los diferentes tipos de empresas.

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1 Foreward

Strong, flexible and sturdy – that’s what a healthy back should be. Thanks to a perfectly coordinated interaction between vertebrae, ligaments and muscles, it is able to do a lot every day. But what happens when this system gets out of balance?

The back is particularly exposed to strain at work or at school. For example, sitting for a long time, heavy lifting and carrying or working in an awkward position can all lead to back problems. However, many of these back strains can be avoided, minimised or compensated for.

We at the German Social Accident Insurance Institutions have set ourselves the goal of reducing back strain and injuries. As such, we have dedicated our current 2013-2015 prevention campaign “Think of me. Love, your back” to the topic of back health. The aim of the campaign is to encourage people to focus more on their backs and to reduce work related back strain.

To learn more about the status quo of “Preventing Back Strain” in companies, we interviewed about 2,600 employees and 1,600 company owners from various sectors and different company sizes. We also asked around 800 Occupational Safety and Health specialists (OSH specialists) to assess the situation in companies: How important is the topic of back strain at work for company owners and employees? Are there already

preventive measures in place to reduce strain and to encourage the health of employees’ backs? If yes, what are these preventive measures?

The results of these surveys are summarised in the following report. They are helping us to adapt our information material, consulting services and other activities to the specific needs of companies.



2 Back strain at work – personal significance

Back pain is regarded as the Nr. 1 most common ailment. In the course of their life, more than two-thirds of all Germans will suffer back pain at least once. Approximately one in ten sick-leave days is attributable to back pain in Germany. More than 26,000 people exit the workforce prematurely due to musculoskeletal ailments. This is almost 15 percent of people who retire early due to health issues.

As these figures show, musculoskeletal ailments play a pivotal role in the world of work. But do managers and employees actually appreciate the importance of these issues? Is back strain an important topic at work? The results of our study show: the answer is yes! Both company management and employees

stated that the topic of back strain at work is important to them: Around 75 percent of those interviewed rated the topic as important, and in fact, 40 percent of company owners and almost half the employees stated that it fully applies that back strain at work is an important issue for them.

However, OSH specialists are only rarely asked about the topic. Only 12 percent of those interviewed fully agreed that they regularly receive queries from companies about the topic. Possibly the reason for this is that there are other contact people for questions relating to prevention measures and activities.

Back strain at work: an important topic for management and employees.



Management rating

The topic of back strain at work is important to me.

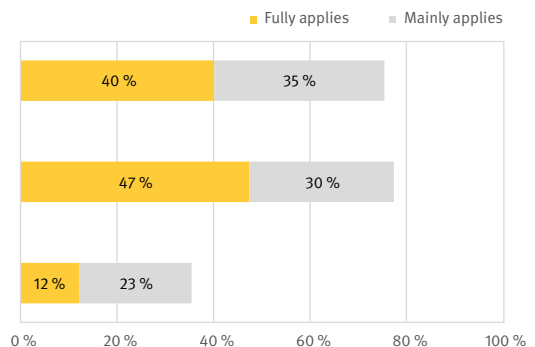


Employee rating

The topic of back strain at work is important to me.

OSH specialists rating

There are a lot of queries from companies regarding the topic of back strain.



3 Prevention culture in companies

There are many working conditions in today’s working world that lead to different occupational strains on the musculoskeletal system. Approximately 23 percent of employees have to regularly move heavy loads at work and around 14 percent of employees work in awkward positions. Repetitive movements with the hands or arms, e. g. at workstations where the same task is performed repeatedly, pose a risk to the musculoskeletal system.

But it is not only excessive strain on back muscles that is unhealthy. Another issue is the large number of employees whose daily life is marked by an increasing lack of movement and/or one-sided strain such as when standing or sitting for long periods of time. In addition, there is the interplay of psycho-

logical and psychosocial stress factors associated with back ailments. The risks are particularly high where physical strain is connected to a high level of psychological strain such as working under pressure, monotony or worrying about job security.

A good prevention culture in a company is the best way to prevent back strain at work. This means that the topic of safety and health is systematically and holistically integrated into the company’s processes and structures. A culture of prevention results from the interaction of shared values, standards, ways of thinking and paradigms. It affects the way people coexist in the company and also the company image that is projected externally.

Company mission statement: health objectives are rarely included.



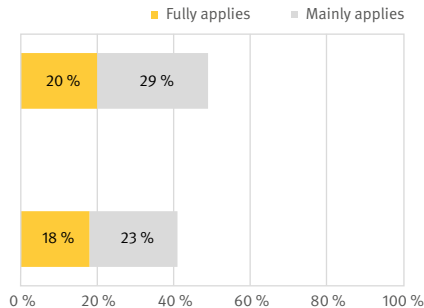
Management rating

Health objectives are a part of our mission statement or company objectives.



Employee rating

Health objectives are a part of our mission statement or company objectives.





Health is a management responsibility in only a few companies.



Management rating

Managers are trained in a management style that encourages good health.

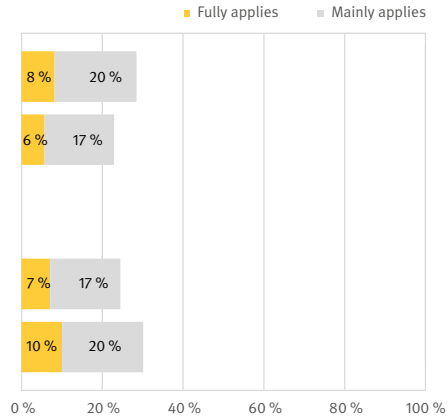
Manager performance appraisals take into consideration a management style that encourages good health.



Employee rating

Managers look at whether back-friendly behaviour is being practised by employees.

Managers actively encourage back-friendly behaviour.



Mission Statement

The basis for a stable prevention culture are shared values and basic assumptions which are defined in the company's health policy.

The survey shows that health goals are not a part of all company's mission statements and corporate objectives. Just one half of owners/managers interviewed and around 40 percent of employees stated that health goals are a core element of company objectives.

Leadership

In order to promote a living culture of prevention, you need people who have already internalised the topic and actively practice it. The issue of health is often located within the human resources department where the OSH specialists or safety officers are found.

However, it is the direct managers who have a strong influence on the well-being and behaviour of employees.

Managers play a pivotal role because they are responsible for determining work tasks, the amount of work and work processes. As such, they can challenge and support employees but they can also overtax them. Additionally, they are role models with their own behaviour. How do managers deal with their own workload? Do they follow OSH regulations? Is their own behaviour "back-friendly"? Are they aware of what is on offer to promote good health?

Until now, health has been seen as a management responsibility by only a few companies. Just one quarter of owners/managers stated that the management team have been trained in a leadership style that promotes good

health. Furthermore, the assessment of a manager’s performance rarely takes into consideration whether the management style encourages good employee health or not.

The survey also showed that, from an employee perspective, leadership and health go hand in hand in only a few companies. Only a quarter of respondents stated that owners/managers look at whether backfriendly behaviour is being practised by employees. 30 percent of respondents said that their managers actively encourage backfriendly behaviour.

Opportunities for employees to have their say

Another factor for a successful culture of prevention in companies is the involvement

of employees in activities and decisions regarding occupational prevention. They are the ones who best know which stressors exist in their workplace and can help identify occupational stressors and hazards. In addition, the employees’ wealth of experience can be drawn upon to develop customised prevention solutions. Finally, involving employees in the planning and execution of health strategies promotes the acceptance and use of what the company has on offer and it also prevents fears and worries.

Just under a half of company managers/owners reported that they involve their employees in implementing measures to promote good health. This also applied to risk assessments with less than half of respondents stating that they involve their employees.

Less than half of all companies involve employees in the planning and implementation of measures.



Management rating

Employees are involved in designing and implementing measures to promote good health.

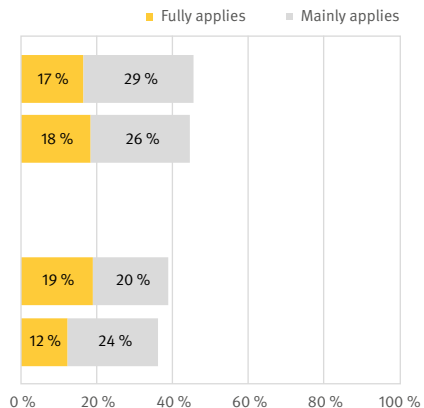
Employees are involved in risk assessments.



Employee rating

We are involved in risk assessments.

We are involved in designing and implementing measures to promote good health.





Employee surveys and health circles.



Opportunities for employee involvement: employee surveys and health circles

Employee surveys on health protection in the workplace

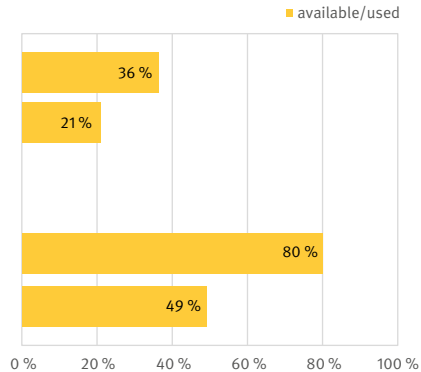
Health circles or other discussion groups for health-related issues at work



Uptake of these opportunities by employees

Employee surveys on health protection in the workplace

Health circles or other discussion groups for health-related issues at work



Employees themselves believe that opportunities for them to get involved are even lower with just a third of respondents stating that they can have a say or can help design measures to promote good health. Employee opinions of risk assessments are even more critical with only 39 percent of respondents stating that they are involved.

Employee surveys and health circles

Employee surveys are one way to involve employees in change processes and to provide them with a means of voicing their opinion and helping to shape preventative solutions.

An anonymous employee survey systematically collects information regarding attitudes, opinions, expectations, experience and behaviour. A survey can also determine subjective feelings towards health. Thus, a comprehensive picture of the health and

stress situation in the company can be obtained.

The “health circle” method is an excellent way of identifying the causes of hazards and factors contributing to poor health that have been uncovered by the employee survey. The method is also useful for developing specific measures to improve working conditions.

Health circles are working groups where employees from different work areas or departments come together to work jointly with experts on optimising working conditions and work processes. This also draws on the wealth of employee experience and acknowledges that they have a voice and are involved in shaping the company.

As shown by our survey, a third of companies conduct employee surveys, a fifth of companies offer their employees the chance to

have their say as part of a health circle. Participation in employee surveys is very high. Eight out of ten employees use this opportunity to share their opinion of working conditions and health risks.

Involvement in health circles is also high with around half of those who have the opportunity to participate in a health circle stating that they have done so.

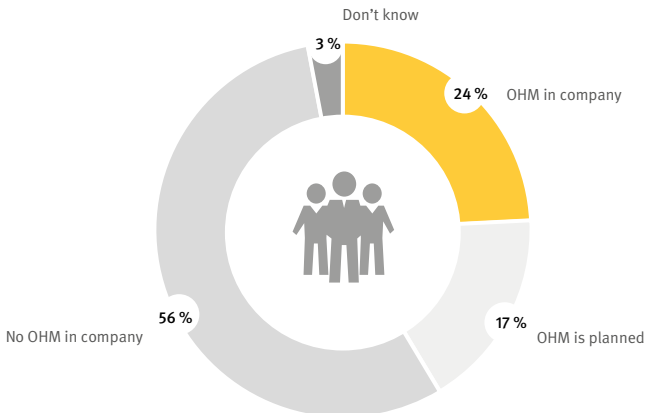
Occupational Health Management

Ideally, a company's prevention culture will be supported by introducing occupational

health management (OHM). In contrast to workplace health promotion (WHP), "health in the company" is systematically and comprehensively integrated into the company's structures and processes by implementing individual measures such as health days and sporting activities. Health management follows the classic management cycle: analyse – set objectives – implement measures – evaluate.

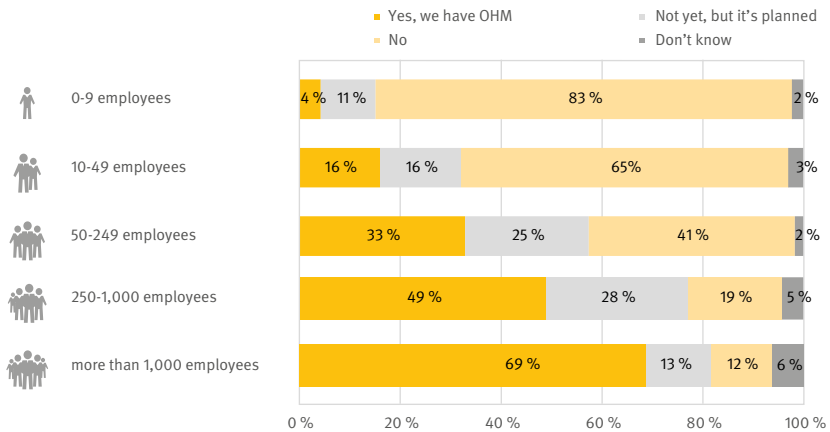
A quarter of company managers/owners reported that their company already has OHM; a further 17 percent stated that they are planning to introduce OHM. However, in

Only a quarter of companies have occupational health management (OHM).





Larger companies place more value on OHM. Small and medium-sized enterprises are more reluctant.



a little more than half of all companies there is no OHM and no plans for it.

The existence of OHM in companies also depends on the size of the company. The larger the company, the more likely it is that OHM exists. In 70 percent of companies with more than 1,000 employees, respondents stated that there is an OHM system in place. This figure drops to 5 percent for companies with fewer than 10 employees.

A survey conducted by the Initiative for Health and Work (Iga Report 20) found that the reasons for not introducing OHM were mainly due to the priority of day-to-day business and a lack of resources. Smaller companies reported that other obstacles included a lack of information regarding the implementation of OHM or not knowing where to go to get external support.

4 Working conditions in companies

Risk Assessment

A risk assessment forms the basis of all health and safety measures in a company. It helps to uncover risks and hazards for workplace accidents and occupational illnesses as well as identifying stress hot spots. It is an important basis for making decisions about preventative measures in a company. Regularly carrying out risk assessments is required by German law.

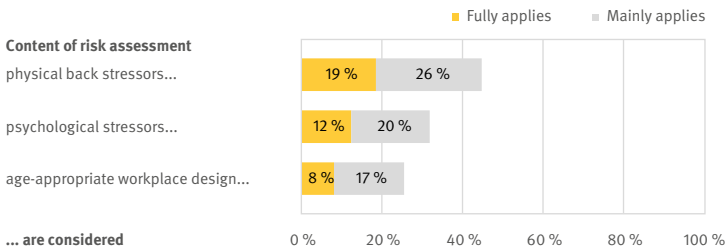
In addition to risks to physical health such as handling heavy loads, vibrations, effects from excessive forces or sedentary work, a risk assessment must also take into consideration detrimental psychological stressors. They have to be assessed in the same way as physical hazards and appropriate measures

put in place to minimise them. This has been a mandatory part of the Occupational Safety and Health Act since 2013.

Psychological stressors are all influences and demands that people face which have an effect on their thinking and feelings. Psychological hazards in the workplace can have different causes: they can result from work tasks (e.g. a lot of responsibility or a lot of flexibility), from the way it is organised (e.g. strict time pressure or shift work), from the work environment (e.g. unpleasant odours or poor lighting) or from social relationships (e.g. the behaviour of managers).

Finally, the risk assessment should analyse the workplace and work processes in terms of

Only 1 in 3 companies take psychological stressors into consideration as part of a risk assessment. Age-appropriate workplace design is taken into consideration even less.



whether they have an age-appropriate design. The survey of company owners/managers showed that physical stressors to the back are taken into consideration as part of a risk assessment in every second company. Psychological stressors, in comparison, are only assessed in one out of three companies. Despite demographic change and an ageing workforce, only every fourth company looks at whether work is age-appropriate as part of their risk assessment.

4.1 Situational Prevention Work

Back strain at work can have a variety of causes. As such, there are also a number of starting points for preventing and minimising back strain.

First and foremost is situational prevention work which aims to identify and eliminate hazards and risks which arise from the work environment and working conditions. Situational prevention activities include technical and organisational changes at the workplace. For example, the risk of back pain and injuries can be reduced by optimising office desks and chairs or by providing employees with the opportunity to change their body posture during their work.

Height-adjustable tables and ergonomic chairs

Not using back muscles enough is just as unhealthy as using them too much. This can result from a lack of movement or from one-sided activities such as constantly sitting or constantly standing. Ergonomic chairs and height-adjustable tables encourage proper

spinal posture and allow employees who work with a computer or do manual work to switch between sitting and standing whilst working. According to prevention experts, this alternating between sitting and standing helps to prevent back problems.

The survey showed that there are ergonomic chairs in 60 percent of all companies. There are also an increasing number of companies that have height-adjustable desks with a third of all companies reporting that they provide these to employees. This varies depending on company size: larger companies are better equipped than smaller companies.

Lifting and carrying aids

Almost a quarter of all employees must regularly move heavy loads as part of their job. Manually moving heavy loads can be avoided or minimised by optimising work processes such as introducing shorter transport distances and better placement of items. However, in many workplaces the transportation of heavy loads is unavoidable. In these cases, introducing technical aids can contribute demonstrably to reducing strain on the musculo-skeletal system.

Most companies provide equipment to help lift and transport heavy loads. 90 percent of company owners/managers who reported that in their companies there is demand for this type of lifting and carrying equipment also stated that this was available. Employees and OSH specialists are some what more critical in their evaluation of the situation, but nevertheless, 80 percent of respondents stated that they have access to equipment to help lift and carry.



**Height-adjustable tables are found in a third of companies.
Most companies have ergonomic chairs.**

Height-adjustable tables
total

**Rating depending
on company size**



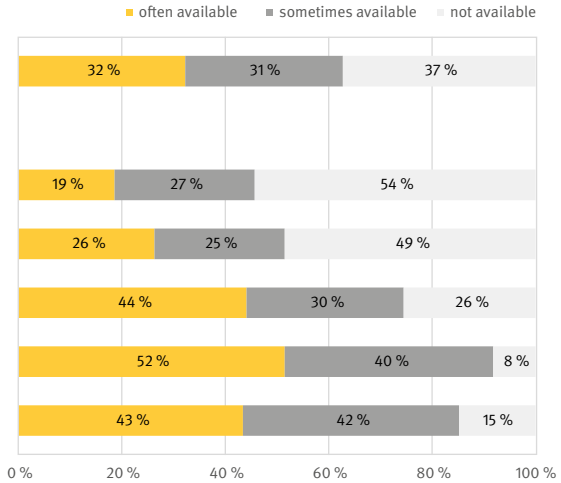
0-9 employees

10-49 employees

50-249 employees

250-1,000 employees

more than 1,000 employees



Ergonomic chairs

Total

**Rating depending
on company size**



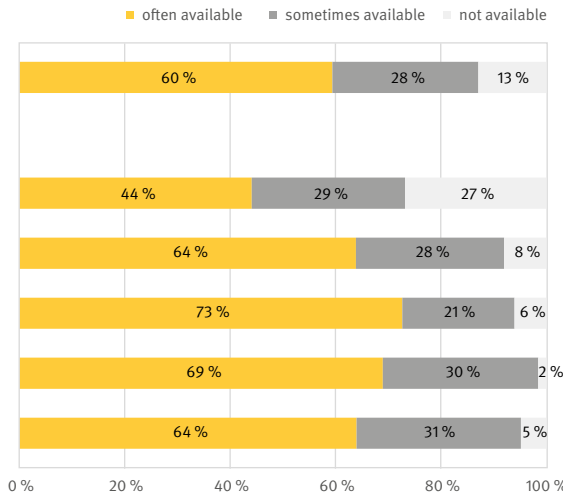
0-9 employees

10-49 employees

50-249 employees

250-1,000 employees

more than 1,000 employees





Lifting and carrying equipment are available where needed.



Management rating

Lifting and carrying equipment are available where needed

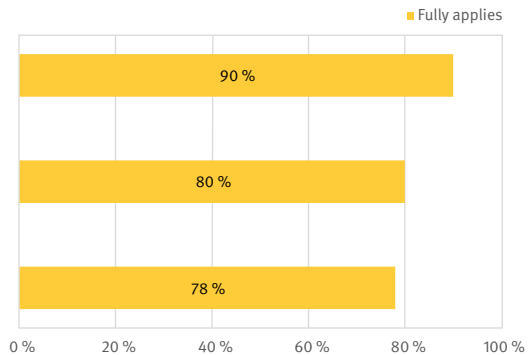


Employee rating

Lifting and carrying equipment are available where needed

OSH specialist rating

Lifting and carrying equipment are available where needed



Consultation by experts

What is the best way to design a computer work station? What should be considered when choosing a monitor and a keyboard? What are the best chairs for office work and which ones allow employees who weigh more than 120 kg to work ergonomically? What lifting and carrying equipment is best and how bright should work stations in different areas be (factory, office, laboratory, etc.)?

There is a lot to consider when designing ergonomic work stations and purchasing new furniture. The appropriate type of chairs, desks, lifting aids and other equipment depends on the type of work being done. As such, companies should ask experts with specialist knowledge to provide consultation and advice. The first point of contact should be their own OSH specialist and occupational physician. They can provide companies with excellent advice because of their knowledge of threshold values, regulations and the latest

technology. They can also look at work processes and identify stress and strain hot spots. However, external consultation for good workplace design is also possible.

Whether experts are involved in designing workplaces or purchasing ergonomic furniture and equipment depends to a large extent on the size of the company. Whereas around 60 percent of companies with 249 to more than 1,000 employees are consulted by an OSH specialist, occupational physician or external consultant, this figure is only 25-30 percent in micro (0-9 employees) and small (10-49 employees) enterprises.

4.2 Behavioural Prevention Work

In addition to situational prevention, in terms of ergonomic design of work stations and work processes, behavioural prevention aims to prevent risky behaviour that can endanger

employee health. Behavioural prevention work encourages healthy behaviour and promotes every individual's own health skills. It includes activities that provide information or training about strategies to deal with work stressors and hazards.

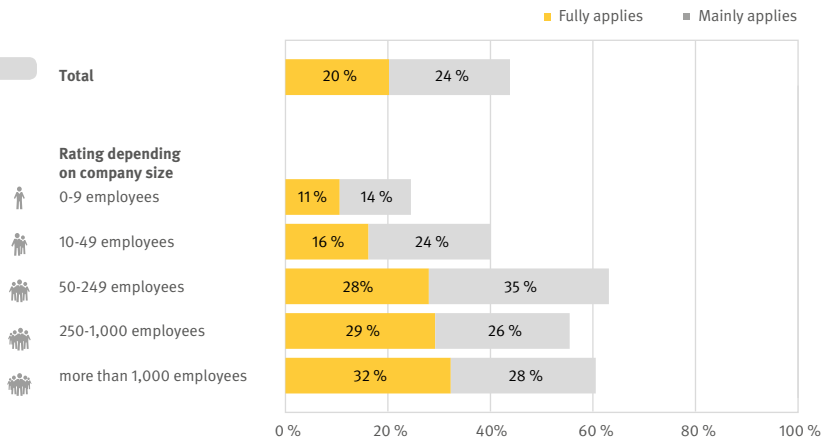
Employee briefings

One specific company information event is the employee briefing, which is a statutory requirement in Germany. At least once a year, companies must inform and instruct their employees about safety and health protection, especially about the hazards they face at work and what they can do to avoid

them. The results of our survey regarding the content of briefings paints a similar picture to that found in risk assessments: physical stressors to the back are discussed most often, information about psychological stressors are covered significantly less, and the topic least discussed is the age-appropriate design of work stations. The assessment of this varied depending on the group surveyed: considerably more OSH specialists stated that all three topics are covered in briefings than the other two groups surveyed. One possible explanation for this difference is that OSH specialists were surveyed to a much larger extent in large companies than the company owners/managers or the employees.



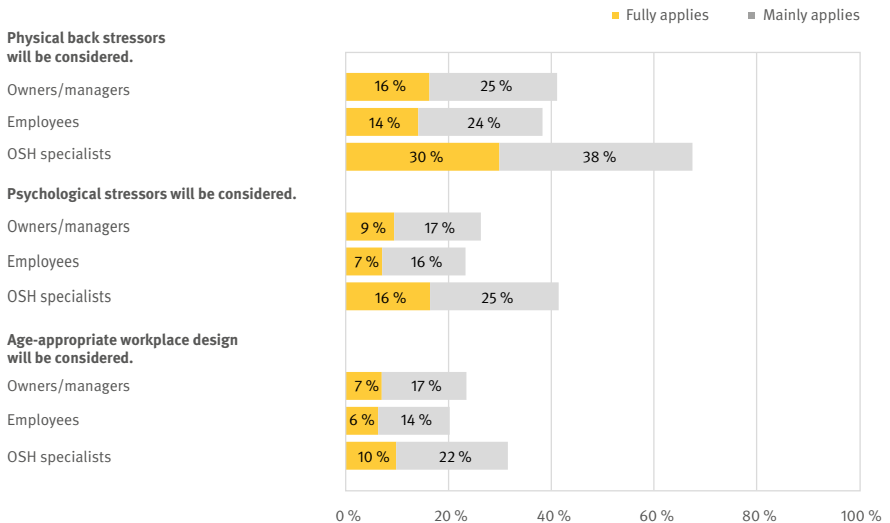
Experts are involved in designing workplaces and purchasing new furniture more frequently in larger companies.



The OSH specialist, the occupational physician or an external consultation are involved in designing workplaces or purchasing ergonomic furniture and equipment.



Psychological stressors and age-appropriate workplace design are also rarely a topic of workplace briefings.



Company services for promoting health

Various in-company prevention activities can be offered to employees in order to foster their health skills. This includes, for example, exercise programmes, relaxation techniques and nutrition courses.

The results of our survey show that approximately six out of ten companies offer services or activities to promote good health. This varies significantly depending on company size: in larger companies there are far more health-promotion activities offered to employees than in smaller companies. Whereas the proportion of smaller companies (up to 49 employees) which offer health-promotion

services is between 36-51 percent, large companies (more than 250 employees) are the exception with only 11-14 percent of companies surveyed stating that they do not provide any services to promote good health. The type of health services on offer to employees also varies depending on company size. Large companies with at least 250 employees focus mostly on health days and in-company exercise programmes. Small companies with less than 50 employees mainly offer stress-prevention training, relaxation techniques and health check-ups. In medium-sized companies with 50-249 employees the most common services were health check-ups, health days and “Back School” (back courses).

Uptake of company services to promote good health

When a company offers services to promote good health, are these taken up by the employees?

Seven out of ten employees whose companies offer health-promotion services stated that they had used at least one of these in the last twelve months. Services that are only offered once a year were most often used by employees, whereas regular activities were used significantly less:

Participation rates in health days and health check-ups is around 60 percent, but in-company exercise programmes (e.g. in-break exercising and company sports), stress-prevention training, relaxation programmes and back school were only used by 30-40 percent of those surveyed.

Least used by employees were company subsidies for external sporting activities with only a quarter of respondents stating that they take advantage of this.



Six out of ten companies offer their employees services to promote good health.

Company services to promote health

Total

■ available

Company services to promote health depending on company size



0-9 employees



10-49 employees



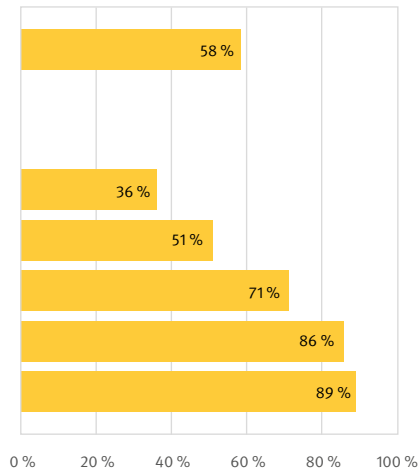
50-249 employees



250-1,000 employees



more than 1,000 employees





Seven out of ten employees make use of company services to improve their health.

Uptake of company services/activities to promote good health

Total

■ Fully applies

Uptake of various services/activities

Health days

Health check-up

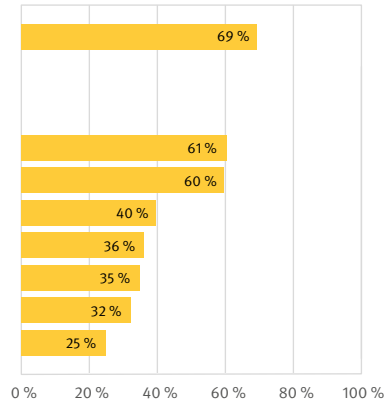
In-company exercise programmes
(e.g. in-break exercises, company sport)

Nutrition consultation/Weight loss

Stress prevention/relaxation courses

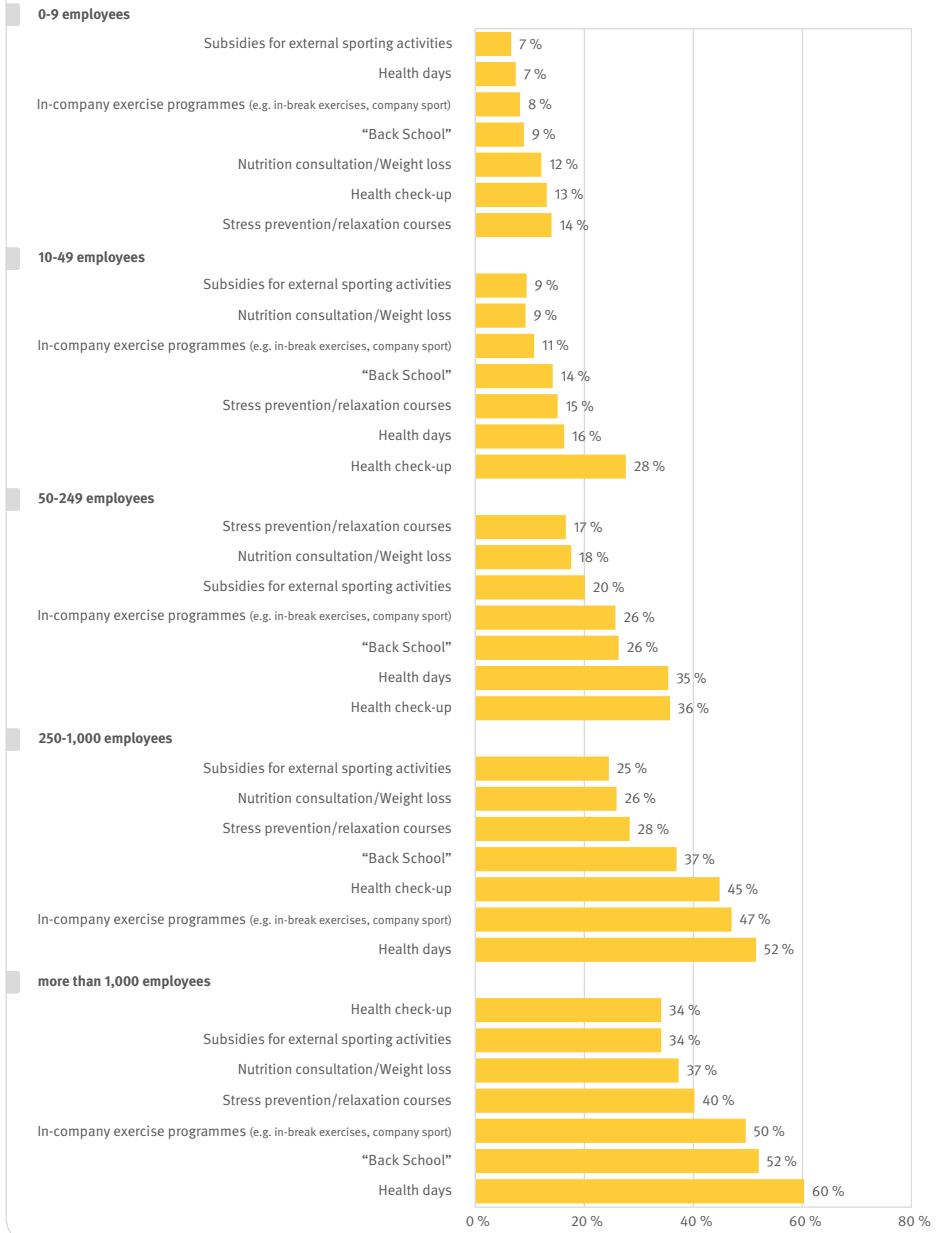
“Back School”

Subsidies for external sporting activities





Company services to promote health depending on company size.



5 Survey design

At the end of 2012/start of 2013, as part of the prevention campaign “Think of me. Love, your back” (German title: “Denk an mich. Dein Rücken”), 1,628 company owners/managers and 2,596 employees from different sectors and company sizes were surveyed on the topic of “Preventing back strain”. In addition, 809 OSH specialists (members of the German Association for Safety, Health and Environmental Protection at Work (VDSI)) were asked for their assessment of the situation in companies. Thus, the people surveyed represent a broad cross-section of companies which are insured by the German Social Accident Insurance Institutions.

Survey method

Three questionnaires were developed for the survey which vary slightly depending on the target group. The survey was conducted in different ways, depending on access to the specific target groups. The OSH specialists were contacted via the VDSI’s email service and were provided with a link to the survey online. Company owners/managers and employees were contacted via their Social Accident Insurance Institution; surveys were mainly sent by mail.

Company size – Company owners/managers

Almost a third of company owners/managers stated that they run a micro enterprise with 1-9 employees (32 %). Around a quarter of respondents stated that they have either a small enterprise with 10-49 employees (25 %)

or a medium-sized enterprise with 50-249 employees (22 %). The proportion of respondents in large enterprises with 250-1,000 employees was 13 percent. The smallest proportion was company owners/managers that run a very large enterprise with more than 1,000 employees (8 %).

Company size – Employees

The majority of employees surveyed work in a very large enterprise with more than 1,000 employees (27 %). Around a fifth of those surveyed are in either a medium-sized company (22 %) with 50-249 employees or a large company with 250-1,000 employees (19 %). 17 percent of employees stated that they work in a small enterprise with 10-49 employees and 15 percent of respondents came from a micro enterprise with 1-9 employees.

Company size – OHS specialists

61 percent of specialists surveyed stated they are employees of the company that they consult. The majority of these are either in a large enterprise with 250-1,000 employees (39 %) or a very large enterprise with more than 1,000 employees (42 %). Approximately 16 percent of respondents work in a medium-sized enterprise with 50-249 employees. A total of 3 percent work in a small enterprise with fewer than 50 employees.

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