



## Less Pressure and More Support for Lifestyle Medicine's Six Pillars

For many employers, health strategy still leans heavily on reacting to problems after they show up: rising claims, burnout, chronic conditions, or low engagement in benefits programs. Lifestyle medicine offers a different way to think about employee wellbeing. Instead of focusing only on treatment, it emphasizes daily habits that help prevent, manage, and in some cases improve chronic health issues before they become more serious.

That is one reason the field is gaining attention. The American College of Lifestyle Medicine defines lifestyle medicine around six connected pillars: nutrition, physical activity, restorative sleep, stress management, social connection, and avoidance of risky substances.<sup>1</sup> For HR professionals, that framework can be especially helpful because it aligns closely with areas where employers already support employees through benefits, education, culture, and wellbeing initiatives.

In a workplace setting, the goal is not to tell employees how to live. It is to make healthy choices more accessible, more understandable, and easier to sustain. That distinction matters. When lifestyle medicine is translated thoughtfully for employers, it becomes less about pressure and more about support.



### The Six Pillars, in Practical Terms

Some pillars will feel familiar right away. **Nutrition** and **movement** have long been part of workplace wellness conversations, but lifestyle medicine frames them in a more grounded, sustainable way. It is less about short-term challenges or trends and more about helping people build routines they can maintain. Current federal guidance continues to emphasize whole, nutrient-dense foods while limiting heavily processed options, and the CDC recommends that adults get at least 150 minutes of moderate-intensity activity each week along with muscle-strengthening activity on two days.<sup>2</sup>

**Sleep** and **stress management** are just as important, especially for today's workforce. Poor sleep and chronic stress do not stay neatly separated from work. They show up in concentration, mood, decision-making, resilience, and overall health. A more supportive workplace can make a real difference here, whether that means manager education, better boundaries around after-hours communication, more visible mental health resources, or simply a culture that does not reward constant exhaustion.

**Social connection** is another pillar that deserves more attention in HR strategy. People are more likely to stick with healthy behavior changes when they feel encouraged, included, and supported. That does not require forced fun or one-size-fits-all programming. It can look like peer support, team-based wellbeing challenges, group education, or simply creating opportunities for employees to connect in more meaningful ways.

**Tobacco and alcohol avoidance** is the sixth pillar, not because it is least important, but because it stands apart from the others. While nutrition, movement, sleep, stress management, and connection focus on building healthier routines, this pillar is about reducing or eliminating substances that can work against those efforts. In practical terms, it reinforces the same message: sustainable health depends not only on what employees add to their lives, but also on what they are supported in stepping away from. For employers, that may mean making cessation resources, substance use support, preventive education, and confidential care pathways easier to find and access.



### Why Shared Support Models Matter

One especially interesting idea for employers to watch is the use of shared medical appointments, sometimes called group visits. In these models, patients with similar health concerns meet together with a clinician and often receive education, support, and care management in a group setting.

That does not mean every employer should try to build a clinical program on its own. But it does suggest that HR and benefits leaders may want to explore partners, plan options, or vendor models that support group-based coaching, education, and chronic condition management. These approaches can help employees feel less alone, which is often a major factor in long-term behavior change.

### What This Means for HR Leaders

For HR professionals, the takeaway is not that every organization needs a branded lifestyle medicine program. It is that many employers already have pieces of this work in place and can make them more effective by connecting them to a clearer strategy. That might include benefits communications that explain the “why” behind healthy habits, wellbeing programming that goes beyond surface-level perks, or partnerships that make it easier for employees to access coaching, preventive care, and condition-specific support.

It also means keeping the employee experience front and center. The most effective programs are usually the ones that feel realistic, flexible, and relevant to everyday life. Small steps tend to go further than sweeping mandates. Encouraging walking meetings, sharing practical nutrition education, improving access to mental health support, promoting sleep-friendly work habits, and creating space for connection can all be meaningful when they are done consistently.

Just as important, HR leaders should approach this work with care around privacy, autonomy, and trust. Employees are much more likely to engage when they feel invited rather than monitored. Supportive education, easy access to resources, and voluntary participation will almost always go further than pressure. Lifestyle medicine may be evidence-based, but in the workplace, it still has to feel human.

There is also a business case for paying attention and other value-focused research describe lifestyle medicine as part of a broader shift toward higher-value care: improving outcomes while helping address long-term cost pressures linked to chronic disease. For employers facing ongoing concerns about claims, absenteeism, and burnout, that makes this more than a wellbeing conversation. It becomes a workforce strategy conversation, too.

Lifestyle medicine is not a quick fix, and it is not a replacement for medical care. But it does offer a helpful framework for HR leaders who want to support healthier employees in a more practical, sustainable way. When employers make it easier for people to move more, eat better, sleep well, manage stress, build connection, and access support, they are not just investing in wellness programming. They are helping create a workplace where people have a better chance to feel and function at their best.



**LISTEN ON THE GO AND SHARE WITH  
YOUR TEAM**

**EXPLORE THIS PODCAST EPISODE  
AND STAY, *ON THE PULSE* WITH IMA.**



**SCAN TO  
LISTEN TODAY!**



#### SOURCES

1. <https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC8713704/> ; <https://www.fns.usda.gov/cnpp/dietary-guidelines-americans>
2. <https://www.cdc.gov/physical-activity-basics/guidelines/adults.html> ; <https://www.cdc.gov/physical-activity-basics/guidelines/index.html>

This material is for general information only and should not be considered as a substitute for legal, medical, tax and/or actuarial advice. Contact the appropriate professional counsel for such matters. These materials are not exhaustive and are subject to possible changes in applicable laws, rules, and regulations and their interpretations.

NPN 1316541 | IMA, Inc dba IMA Insurance Services  
California Lic #0H64724 | CT-TL-IMA-EB-070926

©IMA Financial Group, Inc. 2026

 **IMACORP.COM**