'Tis the season to be eating - and sneezing

"Your employees probably want to keep up their summer workout routines," says Thomas B. Gilliam, co-author of "Move It. Lose It. Live Healthy. Achieve a Healthier Workplace One Employee at a Time!"

But, there are all sorts of excuses. It's too cold ... I don't have time with the kids in school ... swimsuit season is over.

"But, everyone in the company suffers when overweight employees take lots of sick days and rack up high medical bills. Look at it this way: Making it easier for employees to continue their fitness efforts on into the winter is a very real way to boost your economic health," says Gilliam.

In other words, it behooves both employers and employees to stay fit.

Here are a few ways to put those excuses to bed:

- Encourage employees to adopt the buddy system. They are more likely to workout when they have someone else there fighting the same fight. They provide encouragement. "I've found that people are far more likely to stay on track with their fitness routine if they have others to share their ups and downs with," Gilliam says. It's easier to have somebody to walk with and perhaps share some healthy recipes.

- Give exercise-oriented holiday gifts. Forget the fruitcake, try a membership at the local gym. If they like to bicycle, buy them a new helmet. If they like to walk, buy them a cozy jacket. "Fitness-themed gifts will give your employees a subtle reminder to keep up their exercise routines during a season when there is a lot of great (but not always healthy) food around," Gilliam says.

- Stock the break room with healthy foods. Vending machines full of chips and candy bars give a mixed message. Work out a deal with a local grocery store to provide fresh fruits and veggies for employees to snack on. Use the break room bulletin board to post healthy winter food options, such as hearty, healthy hot soups.

For more information, visit www.healthybodyweight.com or www.moveitloseitlivehealthy.com.

KEEP THE COLD OUTSIDE

Not only are colds and the flu miserable for those who have them, they cost all concerned a lot of money.

It's been estimated that there are 1 billion colds in the United States each year, meaning that on average each person has four colds per year. The common cold alone costs businesses between $20 billion and $25 billion annually, according to Safety.BLR.com. To avoid colds, BLR encourages employees to use hand sanitizers often, especially after contact with doorknobs or handles, copier and elevator buttons, countertops, communal food or drink containers, phones or shaking hands.

For more information, visit www.blr.com.

STAY HOME, STAY AWAY

For most, getting a flu vaccination is the best way to avoid seasonal maladies.

In addition to the vaccination, the following simple actions can help prevent the spread of respiratory illnesses:

- Avoid close contact. Stay away from people who are sick and if you are the sick one, stay away from others.

- Stay home. When you aren't feeling well, say home, get plenty of rest and see a doctor
when you need to.

- Cover your mouth and nose. Use a tissue when coughing or sneezing.

- Clean your hands. Washing often will help protect you from germs. Use soap and water, hand wipes or gel sanitizers.

- Avoid touching your eyes, nose or mouth. Germs are often spread when a person touches something that is contaminated with germs and then touch their eyes, nose or mouth.

For more information, visit www.cdc.gov.

Maggie Reed can be reached at margaret.reed@copleynews.com; phone 619-293-5821; or write to P.O. Box 120190, San Diego, CA 92112.

© Copley News Service