

# Corporate fitness pays

 Margaret Ferns

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*According to the Service de Santé au Travail Multisectoriel (STM) one of the most common causes of illness, and therefore absenteeism, its doctors encounter in the course of their work is stress. In our interview with Dr Nicole Majery (Medical Director of the STM) she recommended that 'prevention is better than cure', but noted that people are often reluctant to seek help*

However, given that stress related illness is one of the biggest killers in the western world, she urged a change in attitudes.

Fit By is a sports consultancy which has been up and running successfully in Belgium for the last ten years or so. Following its participation in the B2B fair, Salon Contact (which took place at Luxexpo towards the end of last year) Fit By decided that the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg could benefit from its unique approach to health and fitness. Its representative in Luxembourg, Yannick Bianchini (a graduate, licensed in physical education from the ULB in Brussels) visited the BR offices recently to explain how stress impacts the body and how companies can help their employees via its corporate fitness programme Well-b.

## The impact of stress

"A certain amount of stress is necessary," Bianchini began. "However when you are under too much stress your brain releases certain hormones that can alter how you think, feel and do things. Each organ in the body, including muscles, also changes in their ability to function. Left unmanaged, stress can lead to the degeneration of muscles and organs and ultimately to serious illness and/or depression."

"When you exercise," he continued, "you release other hormones

and chemicals throughout the body. These chemicals are the anti-stress chemicals. They help to balance and neutralise the chemicals produced when stresses occur." In short, exercise is good for stress. However, rushing out to take up a sport when you are not used to that kind of activity is not necessarily the solution. Unsupervised we can too do much too soon, which can lead to injury. Not only that, but the reason most of us are stressed in the first place is due to hectic lifestyles, which makes it difficult to find time for any form of regular exercise.

## The Well-b solution

This is where Well-b by Fit By comes in. "The Well-b corporate fitness concept has had a lot of success in Brussels, where we have some major firms as clients and it is now beginning to take off in Luxembourg." The idea is that companies either set up a

fitness centre on their premises so that a qualified Fit By instructor can come to provide personalised exercise programmes for employees, or organise collective activities at another Fit By centre. In Luxembourg, for example, Fit By has a hall on the Kirchberg.

"By coming to the business premises we save time, thereby immediately eliminating one of the major sources of workplace stress. However, our solutions are designed to be flexible." Bianchini explained that, "We set each person a personalised programme, designed to meet their objectives. Often people are a little nervous at the beginning, especially if they are not particularly sportive, but when they see that our programmes are tailor-made they begin to relax." As each of the sessions is only 40 minutes long Well-b makes sure that the time is used as efficiently as possible, meaning that employees get good results and stay motivated.

## A quick return on investment

"Often companies are hesitant about making the investment as they are concerned that, once the novelty wears off, their employees will lose motivation and gradually stop coming to the sessions," said Bianchini. "However, as we are on hand to accompany the employee, offering encouragement and advice (nutritional and fitness) we find that those who sign up for the programme tend to see it through to the end."

Bianchini urged companies to consider making this type of investment for their employees saying, "They can very quickly recuperate any costs via reduced absenteeism as a result of stress or depression, a more motivated and productive workforce and by attracting and keeping good people thanks to a dynamic external image."

[www.fitby.lu](http://www.fitby.lu)



Yannick Bianchini