MU looking into domestic partnership benefits for employees

Tuesday, December 29, 2009 | 12:01 a.m. CST
BY Carla Jimenez

COLUMBIA — For the first time, MU Equity is gathering data on how a lack of domestic partnership benefits is affecting hiring.

"We're trying to back up the assumption that we're losing quality candidates," said MU Equity Director Noel English.

The office has been getting the word out that it is collecting stories, such as Ron Kelley's. In fall 2008, Kelley, director of development at MU, had a position open for a director of development research. He met a woman at a conference who seemed promising.

"It's very hard to find people who are capable for this job, so we approached her about it," Kelley said.

He gathered a pool of candidates, this woman included. She later asked if the university offered domestic partnership benefits. When Kelley said no, the candidate backed out of the interview process.

Jackie Litt, director of the women's and gender studies department at MU, said she has also known candidates who have refused to be interviewed for the same reason.

According to MU Equity, which works with faculty, staff and students who believe they have been treated unfairly, stories such as these have been floating around different departments for some time now.

"It seems like everyone has an anecdote," English said. "Our intent is to share them with whoever's making the case for partner benefits to make it part of the body of evidence."

She and Litt maintain this is a major problem for the university. "At a chairs council meeting, Betsy Rodriguez (head of human resources for the University of Missouri System) asked how many have been affected, and a good number of hands were raised," Litt said.

Litt said not only is the university losing quality candidates, it's also losing quality faculty members because of the lack of domestic partnership benefits.
English wants to instate an exit interview, which is a survey used to determine reasons people leave as well as to get candid feedback about campus resources and climate. It would be "just a general survey to give us some direction in improving the conditions for, in this case, faculty," English said.

She said UM System President Gary Forsee expects to receive several related proposals. "The word we've gotten is that he is receptive," English said.

Rodriguez said the university has no plans to start such benefits any time soon. "It's not in the immediate future," she said.

UM spokeswoman Jennifer Hollingshead said that generally speaking, Forsee is "always open to hearing information presented by the campuses."

"Domestic partnership benefits will be considered as part of the system's annual review of the benefits package," Hollingshead said. "Every year, we evaluate employee requests and other changes."
Booster Shots  THE LA TIMES BLOG ABOUT ODITIES' MUSINGS AND NEWS FROM THE HEALTH WORLD

Count to 5--it's the holidays!

December 22, 2009

Something about the holidays compels people to write lists. Maybe that's why we've been bombarded lately with "five things" pitches that consist of five tips and tricks to get or stay healthy through the holidays—you know, de-stress, avoid the 5-pound weight gain, etc. To say most of these reek of common sense and redundancy is being kind, but maybe there are one or two pointers that will help make your holidays a happier, healthier time (Note: Some tips have been edited, but we retained the key elements):

From ChicagoHealers.com, a site dedicated to natural medicine and a holistic lifestyle, "Tips for Healthy Digestion after Holiday Eating." We're pretty much down with everything except the one about drinking apple cider vinegar diluted in water first thing in the morning. Not. Going. To happen.

1. Walk it off: Walking helps food move along the digestive tract, improving digestion and absorption. For added benefits, walk while massaging your abdomen with your palms, in a circle around your belly button.

2. Drink herbal tea: Relieve that feeling of fullness with herbal teas that target your digestion. Steep one teaspoon each of mint, rosemary, oregano, cilantro, sage and basil and in a cup of hot water. Drink after each meal to soothe and prevent bloating.

3. The next morning drink apple cider: Apple cider vinegar is traditionally used to remedy digestive distress, support liver detoxification, normalize digestive juices, and reduce intestinal bloating. Mix one tablespoon of organic apple cider vinegar with 12 ounces of warm water, and drink in the morning on empty stomach. Feel free to add a little honey or maple syrup.

4. Eat right: After overdoing it, make sure to eat meals with fiber and protein to help your body recover from the overindulgence.

5. Drink Water: Though this is hardly a secret remedy for combating a hangover, it bears repeating. Alcohol dehydrates your system, so drinking plenty of water will help combat some of your unpleasant hangover symptoms, rehydrate your body and flush out toxins.

The University of Missouri devised some holiday survival strategies based on research studies conducted throughout the year. Not to knock these health and fitness smarts who no doubt have advanced degrees, but we can't get past the clock thing in the first tip. Because once we spot the brie, we're loading up (They also sneaked in a sixth tip which is not cool, Mizzou. You know the rules):

1. "Try eating around the clock at parties—grab the smallest plate available and look at the plate as though it was a clock face," said Ann Cohen, associate state nutrition specialist for the College of Human Environmental Sciences and MU Extension. "From the noon to 6:00 position, fill it with lots of fruits and vegetables. At the 6 to 7:00 position, fill it with dip or salsa. From the 7 to 8:00 position, add some nuts. From 8 to 10:00, place crackers and cheese. The 10 to midnight position is the space for a sweet treat. Then, have a good time at the party 'eating around the clock,' starting at noon and ending at midnight."
2. "It is helpful to focus on behavioral strategies for exercise during the holiday season," said Vicki Conn, associate dean in the Sinclair School of Nursing. "Effective strategies include setting specific behavioral goals, providing reminders or cues to exercise, rewarding yourself for exercising and self-monitoring your exercise by recording all exercise sessions."

3. "Be realistic--don't focus on losing weight during the holidays. Focus on maintaining your current weight," said Susan Mills-Gray, nutrition specialist with MU extension and HES.

4. "Make sure whatever you're offered is splurge-worthy," Mills-Gray said. "Why waste calories on foods you can have anytime?"

5. "While holiday shopping, the coffee drink you choose many have more calories than you realize," said Tammy Roberts, nutrition specialist for extension and HES.

6. "Relationship conflicts can increase during busy holiday times," said Constance Brooks, nursing professor and instructor in the Master of Public Health Program. "To reduce stress, be clear in explaining to others what you want and need, instead of telling them what you want them to do."

If you need to fight stress, take the advice from the online gaming and entertainment website GR88.com. Because no one understands the pressures of the holiday like people who run an online poker and gaming website.

1. Music: According to Forbes, this was the No. 1 way Americans relieved stress in the tumultuous year of 2009. Numerous studies have demonstrated the role of music in relieving stress and it has been discovered that the rhythm or the beat of the music relieves stress.

2. Online gaming: With new online forms of entertainment and gaming emerging, researchers are beginning to find evidence that a wide variety of games can be relaxing.

3. Exercise: The therapeutic benefits of regular exercise are well documented. Study after study has shown that it increases health and general well being. It's been said that if exercise were a drug, it would be the most powerful medication on earth.

4. Mix up your daily routine: Mixing it up, whether by altering your routine or trying something new--like changing your hairstyle--can improve your outlook and mood.

5. Write it out: The physical process of writing, in combination with taking the time to focus on the things that are bothering you, can be very cathartic. What you write is not important; it is the process and the frequency that counts.

If quitting smoking is on your to-do list for the New Year, the American Lung Assn. has some recommendations for getting through the toughest days (they tried to sneak by seven tips, but we've condensed them to five because this is just getting out of hand now):

1. Talk to your doctor or pharmacist about the different over-the-counter and prescription medications to help you quit smoking.

2. Look into the different options available to help smokers quit. Visit www.lungusa.org or call (800) 548-8252 for suggestions.

3. Take time to plan. Pick your quit date a few weeks ahead of time and mark it on the calendar. If you can, pick a day when life's extra stresses are not at their peak, such as after the holidays. Mark a day on the calendar and stick to it.
4. Get some exercise every day. Walking is a great way to reduce the stress of quitting. Exercise is proven to not only combat weight gain but also to improve mood and energy levels. Eat a balanced diet, drink lots of water and get plenty of sleep.

5. Ask family, friends and co-workers for their help and support. Having someone to take a walk with or just listen can give a needed boost. You don’t have to quit alone. Help is available online and in your community. Consider joining a stop-smoking program like Freedom From Smoking from the American Lung Assn.

So there you have it. Count to five and the holidays will be breeze.

-- Jeannine Stein