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Most workers improving their personal health to compensate for rising healthcare costs, Watson Wyatt says

Rising healthcare benefit costs are causing considerable angst among U.S. workers, according to a new survey by Watson Wyatt Worldwide, a leading global consulting firm. However, most workers say they are willing to improve their own health to help control future costs and prepare themselves for a more enjoyable retirement.

In its survey of nearly 2,100 U.S. workers, Watson Wyatt found that more than half (51 percent) of respondents are highly concerned that they won't be able to pay for healthcare coverage when they retire. More than one-third (35 percent) of respondents are concerned that a major medical expense would ruin them financially.

Many workers are also worried about the impact of rising costs in the near term. Two in three (68 percent) believe their deductibles and copayments will increase in the next two years; more than half are worried that their employer will reduce their health benefits coverage.

According to the survey, 12 percent of workers have reduced contributions to their retirement savings plans because of higher healthcare costs, while 18 percent have cut back on contributions to other savings. About one in four workers also reported higher stress levels due to rising healthcare costs.

The majority (61 percent) of workers say they see a connection between maintaining a healthy lifestyle and controlling cost increases. Moreover, many employees are willing to make changes in their lifestyle to improve their current health status 31 percent are in the process of doing so, and 27 percent are considering making a change.

The survey found that six in ten employees have tried to take better care of themselves, with 37 percent getting an annual physical. In addition, 42 percent are attempting to control health expenditures by choosing a lower-cost drug option when available.