OBJECTIVE: Decreased on-the-job productivity represents a large yet poorly characterized indirect cost to employers. We studied the impact of employee health risk factors on self-reported worker productivity (presenteeism).

METHODS: Using a brief version of the Work Limitation Questionnaire incorporated into a Health Risk Appraisal, 28,375 employees of a national company responded to the survey. The association between health risks and work limitation and each of the four domains was examined. Percentage of lost productivity also was estimated.

RESULTS: Ten of 12 health risk factors studied were significantly associated with self-reported work limitations. The strength of the associations varied between risks and the four domains of work limitation. Perception-related risk factors such as life dissatisfaction, job dissatisfaction, poor health, and stress showed the greatest association with presenteeism. As the number of self-reported health risk factors increased, so did the percentage of employees reporting work limitations. Each additional risk factor was associated with 2.4% excess productivity reduction. Medium and high-risk individuals were 6.2% and 12.2% less productive than low-risk individuals, respectively. The annual cost of lost productivity in this corporation was estimated at between $99M and $185M or between $1392 and $2592 per employee.

CONCLUSIONS: Health risk factors represent additional causes of lost productivity.