

## **Guidelines for Participation in Wellness and Fitness Programs For Cornell University Employees**

### **Statement:**

Cornell's employees are a critical part of the University community and contribute significantly to the university's continued success. That impact is greatly enhanced when staff are supported in personal and professional development activities that enrich their skills, assist in attaining performance and professional goals, and ensure continued success in their role. In addition, Cornell recognizes the impact feeling healthy and sustained has on employees' abilities to contribute fully, and the role that wellness activities can play in fostering overall health.

A 2003 review of 42 studies showed that worksite health promotion programs can lead to more than 25% reductions *each* in absenteeism, health care costs, and disability/workers' compensation costs.<sup>1</sup> In addition, the CDC's Six Step Guide for Employers: Reducing the Risk of Health Disease and Stroke recommends policies such as allowing employees to use work time for health promotion activities.<sup>2</sup>

*In support of this commitment, all supervisors are encouraged to familiarize themselves with the options available when employees submit requests related to wellness activities.*

### **Reason For Guideline:**

This guideline provides guidance to administrators, supervisors, local human resource representatives, and staff to create opportunities for optimizing personal health and wellness. The purpose of this guideline is to allow staff to engage in physical exercise and wellness activities while at work to improve and sustain their personal health, job performance and work satisfaction, and achieve a reduction in health benefit costs to the University.

### **Wellness**

Wellness activities are defined as activities that promote the health and well-being of the individual such as physical exercise, health assessment and screening, weight loss, nutrition classes, stress management, and smoking cessation classes. Wellness time should not be used to take care of personal business, to go to medical appointments, to commute, or to watch sports events.

Information about University sponsored activities relating to wellness can be found on the Wellness Program website and the Office of Human Resources website. Other activities may qualify for wellness release time at the discretion of the supervisor.

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<sup>1</sup> Chapman L. Meta-evaluation of worksite health promotion economic return studies. Art of Health Promotion Newsletter 2003 Jan/Feb: 6(6):1-10.

<sup>2</sup> Koffman D.M., Molloy M., Agin L., Sokler L. Reducing the Risk of Heart Disease and Stroke: A Six-Step Guide for Employers. CDC

**Flex Time**

Flex time permits variations in starting and departure times, but does not alter the total number of hours worked in a workweek.

**Release Time**

Release time is defined as paid time where an employee is relieved of regular duties to attend personal or professional development opportunities. Supervisors may revoke release time at any time.

**Guidelines**

- Staff requesting release or flex time are expected to work with the supervisor to ensure business needs are met and the impact to the department is minimized.
- Supervisors should consider employees' requests for flex time or release time to participate in wellness-related activities. Typically, to participate in wellness activities, employees need at least 90 minutes of flex time or release time per week.
  - Units are encouraged to develop their own guidelines to encourage participation while still meeting business needs.
- Granting flex or release time is up to the discretion of the supervisor. Supervisors are encouraged to:
  - Carefully consider employees' requests.
  - Be as flexible and creative as possible.
  - Consider current and anticipated business needs of the organization.
  - Take into account other personal/professional development goals for the employee.
  - Review the plan after a determined amount of time – at least annually.
- In most cases, employees must be consistently performing at a level of “Fully Meets Expectations” or better in order to take advantage of this option.
- Typically, release time is prorated for part-time employees.
- Supervisors with questions about the use of this benefit should contact their local human resource representative.

## Sample Scenarios

A busy office has several employees wishing to take advantage of wellness release time. They are sensitive to the office needs and worked out a schedule that the supervisor approves. One employee takes a water aerobics class from 7-7:45am and arrives at the office by 8:15am. Two employees are already at work by 8:00am, when the office opens. At 11:00am, another employee leaves for a 45- minute yoga class. Another employee schedules her workouts in the fitness center so that they do not interfere with anyone else's exercise schedule. In this environment, all staff encourage each other to stay fit, and it becomes the norm.

The employee leaves the office at 12:00 on Monday, Wednesday, and Friday and returns at 1:30 p.m. During that time, employee travels to Helen Newman Hall, changes, participates in a 45-minute group fitness class from 12:15 – 1:00 p.m., changes, and returns to the office. 42 minutes was lunch, the remaining 48 minutes was *release time*.

The same employee leaves the office at 12:00 on Monday, Wednesday, and Friday and returns at 1:30 p.m. During that time, employee travels to Helen Newman Hall, changes, participates in a 45-minute group fitness class from 12:15 – 1:00 p.m., changes, and returns to the office. 42 minutes was lunch, the remaining 48 minutes was *flex time*. To compensate, the employee starts working ½ hour earlier 5 days per week.

An employee has a large project on Monday and is unable to leave the office for his scheduled fitness class. The employee will not be able to carry over the release time to Wednesday or any other day. The release time in this case is forfeited.

Another employee works with a unit that has a busy season in the summer. All the staff in the unit may request release time, however, it is only granted between September and May to meet the business needs of this unit.

A similar unit is usually swamped with calls first thing in the morning and at the end of the day. These employees may only request to participate in wellness activities between 10am and 3pm to meet the business needs of this unit.

**Sample Form**

**Release/Flex Time Request Form for Staff Wellness Activities**

Employees: Please fill out and submit this form to your supervisor.

Employee Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Department: \_\_\_\_\_ College/Unit: \_\_\_\_\_

Title of Wellness Activity: \_\_\_\_\_

Give a brief description of the Wellness Activity and the time requirement:

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_ Time/s: \_\_\_\_\_ # Hours: \_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
Employee Signature Date

Supervisor Comments:  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
Supervisor Signature Date