



## Cornell University Wellness Program

# 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 Heart 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 outline various options that would 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 Activities Defined:**

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. Wellness activities may be formal or informal, do not have to be connected with a programmatic initiative, and are not limited to those sponsored by the university. Wellness activities do not include taking care of personal business, attending medical or other health practitioner appointments, commuting, or watching sports events.

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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

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

**Flex Time Defined:**

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

**Release Time Defined:**

Release time is defined as paid leave where an employee is relieved of regular duties to attend wellness activities.

**Guidelines For Requesting Time:**

- 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. Flex or release time provided for wellness activities does not reduce the overall workload or duties of the staff member.
- 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 approximately 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.
- Employees need to have good attendance and their overall job performance must be consistently performing at a level of “Fully Meets Expectations” or better in order to take advantage of flex or release time for Wellness.
- Supervisors may revoke release time at any time.
- If release time is needed for part-time employees, it will typically be pro-rated.
- Use of flex or release time should not result in overtime for non-exempt staff.
- Record keeping: Release time should be recorded as *paid leave* in the appropriate reporting system such as Colts or Kronos.
- Release time does not cover instances of illness or leave that are otherwise covered by University policy.

- 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 7-7:45 AM and arrives at the office by 8:15 AM. Two employees are already at work by 8:00 AM, when the office opens. At 11:00 AM, 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 noon on Monday, Wednesday, and Friday and returns at 1:30 PM. During that time, employee travels to Helen Newman Hall, changes, participates in a 45-minute group fitness class from 12:15 – 1:00 PM, changes, and returns to the office. 42 minutes was lunch, the remaining 38 minutes was *release time*.

The employee leaves the office at noon on Monday, Wednesday, and Friday and returns at 1:30 PM. During that time, employee travels to Helen Newman Hall, changes, participates in a 45-minute group fitness class from 12:15 – 1:00 PM, 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 10:00 AM and 3:00 PM to meet the business needs of this unit.

**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 \_\_\_\_\_