



Flexible Work Arrangements: Participation Guidelines for Wellness and Fitness Programs

Flex Before Release 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. Cornell recognizes the impact that feeling healthy and sustained has on employees' abilities to contribute fully, and the role that wellness activities can play in fostering overall health.

A review of 42 studies has shown that worksite health promotion programs can lead to more than 25 percent reductions each in absenteeism, health care costs, and disability/workers' compensation costs. 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.

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 the Guidelines

These guidelines assist administrators, supervisors, local human resource representatives, and staff in creating opportunities for optimizing personal health and wellness. They outline various options that would allow staff to engage in physical exercise and wellness activities while at work, improving and sustaining their personal health, job performance and work satisfaction, and reducing health care costs to the university.

Wellness and Fitness

Wellness and fitness activities promote the health and well-being of the individual. They include such activities as:

- physical exercise,
- health assessment and screening,
- weight loss,
- nutrition classes,

- stress management, and
- smoking cessation.

Wellness and fitness 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.

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 and/or flex time at the discretion of the supervisor.

Release Time

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

Flex Time

Flex time permits variations in starting and departure times, but does not alter the total number of hours worked in a workweek. To learn more about flex time, please visit www.ohr.cornell.edu/workLife/flex/flexAlternative.html.

If a staff person is requesting release or flex time to take part in wellness and fitness activities the supervisor and staff person need to fill out a [Flexible Work/Wellness Agreement](#) form. (PDF)

Guidelines

Staff requesting release or flex time are expected to work with

the supervisor to ensure that business needs are met and the impact to the department minimized. Release or flex time provided for wellness activities does not reduce the overall workload or duties of the staff member.

Supervisors should consider employees' requests for release or flex time to participate in wellness-related activities. Typically, to participate in wellness activities, employees need approximately 90 minutes of release or flex time per week.

Units are encouraged to develop their own guidelines to encourage participation while still meeting business needs.

Granting release or flex 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 release or flex 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 release or flex 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 a.m. and arrives at the office by 8:15 a.m. Two employees are already at work by 8:00 a.m., when the office opens. At 11:00 a.m., 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.

The employee leaves the office at 12:00 noon on Monday, Wednesday, and Friday and returns at 1:20 p.m. During that time, the 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 counts as lunch, the remaining 38 minutes was release time

The employee leaves the office at 12:00 noon on Monday, Wednesday, and Friday and returns at 1:30 p.m. During that time, the 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 counts as lunch, the remaining 48 minutes was flex time. To compensate, the employee starts working 1/2 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, this unit only grants release time between September and May, so that its business needs can be fulfilled.

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 a.m. and 3 p.m., in order to ensure that the business needs of this unit are met.