

UNIVERSITY of HOUSTON
MANUAL OF ADMINISTRATIVE POLICIES AND PROCEDURES

SECTION: Human Resources
AREA: Benefits

Number: 02.02.08

SUBJECT: Fitness Release Time and Wellness Leave

I. PURPOSE AND SCOPE

In accordance with the [State Employees Health Fitness and Education Act of 1983](#), as amended, this policy has been established to support University of Houston employees in their efforts to improve their health and well-being and to reduce or eliminate problems affecting their work performance and productivity.

II. POLICY

The University of Houston Employee Wellness program strives to increase the well-being and productivity of all employees through enhancement of all aspects of health. The program seeks to increase awareness of positive health behaviors, motivate employees to voluntarily adopt healthier behaviors, and provide opportunities and a supportive environment to foster positive lifestyle changes.

III. DEFINITIONS

A. Eligible Employees: Full-time, benefits-eligible employees who have been employed with the University of Houston for a minimum of three (3) months from date of hire.

Note: An employee in a position in which he or she is required to be a student as a condition of employment is NOT eligible for this program.

B. Fitness Release Time (FRT): The time period up to thirty (30) minutes, three times per week, provided to eligible employees to participate in approved physical fitness activities.

C. Wellness Leave: The incentive program of up to eight (8) hours of leave to eligible employees who have completed an approved online Health Risk Assessment (HRA) and received an annual comprehensive physical exam.

D. Health Risk Assessment (HRA): An HRA or health survey is a collection of health-related data which a medical provider can use to evaluate the health status and the health risks of an individual. This information enables a medical provider to provide tailored feedback in an approach to reduce any risk factors, as well as the potential inevitability of the diseases to which they are related.

E. Comprehensive Physical Exam: A comprehensive physical exam consists of a detailed medical history, physical examination, and age- and sex-appropriate counseling and screening tests. It is a customized exam that includes provision of evidence-based counseling and screening tests based on the patient's health status, risk factors, and personal and family history. Annual physical exams are considered preventive care and are usually covered by the employee's insurance policy. However, the employee may be responsible for some out-of-pocket expenses related to the appointment(s), such as applicable co-pays, additional

screenings, etc. It is recommended that employees verify information with their doctor's office and/or insurance carrier to determine what fees may be involved prior to the examination.

- F. Supporting Materials: FRT and Wellness Leave Forms, which include the [FRT Application Form](#), [Physical Activity Readiness Questionnaire](#), [Health Risk Assessment and Physician's Certification of Routine Physical Exam Affidavit](#), etc., as well as a link to the approved HRA for [Blue Cross/Blue Shield of Texas \(BCBSTX\) Health Select](#) found on the [Human Resources Health and Wellness webpage](#).

IV. GENERAL PROVISIONS

- A. The Employee Wellness Program strives to increase the well-being and productivity of all employees through enhancement of all aspects of health. The program consists of information, programs and services that focus on health awareness and education, positive behavior/lifestyle change, and the development of a wellness culture to help employees accomplish their health and wellness goals.
- B. Some programs are offered during the lunch hour. From time to time, workshops or activities will be planned during work hours. Supervisors are encouraged to allow for flexible scheduling to accommodate employee participation in wellness programs that are not offered during lunch breaks or occur off hours, when possible.
- C. Fitness Release Time (FRT)
1. Fitness Release Time (FRT) is available to full-time, benefits-eligible employees who have been with the University of Houston for a minimum of 3 months from date of hire. FRT is only available for approved physical fitness activities.
 2. Employees who are approved for FRT may receive up to thirty (30) minutes, three times per week to participate in approved physical fitness activities.
 3. The FRT may not interfere with the employee's duties or the department's responsibilities; therefore, supervisor approval is required before the employee may commence and/or continue with this program.
 4. A supervisor's approval is necessary before commencing any physical fitness activity under the FRT policy. Employees must complete the [FRT application](#) process to participate in the program and may apply at any time throughout the year. **HR Approval will be granted to applicants on a year to year basis (CY).** However, once approved, **participants must renew their application with HR every spring at the start of each new calendar year.**
- Note: Once an application is approved for the calendar year by HR, **employees must then obtain direct approval from their supervisor at the start of each new semester to begin and/or continue participation in the program.** Supervisors reserve the right to change the time requested, decrease the amount of FRT allowed, or to refuse or revoke an employee's participation altogether at any time.
5. FRT cannot be used at the start or the finish of the work day (i.e., to come in 30 minutes late or to leave 30 minutes early). It can, however, be connected to an employee's lunch hour as long as **it does not interfere with employee's duties or the department's responsibilities, and the supervisor approves.**

6. Approved physical fitness activities are ones that involve exercise/movement of the body. Examples of approved activities include walking the Cougar Walking Paths, Tai Chi, Yoga, working out or taking a Zumba class at the Campus Recreation and Wellness Center (CRWC), or participating in an on-campus organized wellness initiative such as Wellness Walks. If the employee is uncertain if an activity they wish to pursue meets the criteria for the program, they should contact POWERUP@uh.edu.
7. The employee must record FRT in the Time Reporting and Absence Management (TRAM) system. See [MAPP 02.05.02, Employee Time Reporting](#) for details regarding the TRAM system.
8. FRT is compensated as straight time only. It is not to be used for the purposes of overtime pay or compensatory time, where applicable.
9. FRT cannot be requested in conjunction with the College Release Program. See [MAPP 02.06.01, Staff Training and Development](#) for details regarding the College Release Program.
10. Failure to adhere to the guidelines established in MAPP 02.02.08 and other MAPP policies may result in corrective action, up to and including termination of employment. See [MAPP 02.04.05, Termination Clearance](#) for details regarding Termination Clearance.

D. Wellness Leave Program

1. To encourage UH employees to be aware of and reduce their health risks, the University will provide a wellness leave incentive of up to eight (8) hours to qualified employees who complete an approved online Health Risk Assessment (HRA) and receive an annual comprehensive physical exam.
2. The wellness leave time is available to full-time, benefits-eligible employees who have been with the University of Houston for a minimum of three (3) months from date of hire, to be used only once per Calendar Year (CY).
3. The wellness leave provides eight (8) hours of leave time per Calendar Year to an employee and may be used for any purpose.
4. Wellness leave may be granted for either one full day or two half days and must be scheduled with supervisor's approval. Wellness leave must be used within the Calendar Year (CY) it was earned and be approved by Human Resources

V. PROCEDURES

A. Fitness Release Time: To request FRT, the following steps must be completed:

1. The employee completes the [FRT Application](#) requesting up to thirty (30) minutes, three times per week to participate in an approved physical fitness activity. With this application, the employee describes the activity and days/times selected for participation in FRT on the form and submits it to his/her supervisor for review.
2. The supervisor meets with the employee to discuss the request, approves and signs the form, or denies the request. If the form is approved, the employee completes the [Physical Activity Readiness Questionnaire \(PAR-Q\) form](#). If all answers are "no" on the [PAR-Q](#), the employee scans both the completed and signed [FRT Application](#)

and the [PAR-Q](#) and submits both documents to Human Resources via POWERUP@uh.edu. If the request is denied by the supervisor, the employee may not use FRT during that semester but may apply for future semesters.

3. If the employee answers “Yes” to one or more of the questions on the [PAR-Q](#), the employee obtains a signed **Medical Clearance Form from their doctor** stating approval to engage in a physical fitness activity from his/her primary care physician. The employee should then scan and e-mail all three (3) fully completed documents ([FRT Application](#), [PAR-Q](#), and Medical Clearance) to Human Resources via POWERUP@uh.edu for approval to receive FRT to participate in a physical fitness activity. If the employee does not receive medical clearance to participate in a physical fitness activity, the employee should work with his physician toward meeting the requirements for the program in the future, if appropriate, at which time he/she may reapply for the program.
4. Once all requirements for participation are met, the FRT will be approved by Human Resources, who in turn notifies the employee and the employee’s supervisor via e-mail. The employee retains copies of all forms for his/her records. The original forms are filed in Human Resources.
5. Employees must request the time off for FRT for each thirty (30) minute session via the Time Reporting and Absence Management (TRAM) system, using Code 083 for biweekly employees and Code 082 for monthly employees.
6. The supervisor approves FRT in TRAM on a biweekly or monthly basis, as applicable, as long as the FRT does not exceed thirty (30) minutes, three times per week.

B. Wellness Leave Program: To request up to eight (8) hours of wellness leave time, the following steps must be completed:

1. The employee completes the approved HRA and prints the completion certificate/e-mail. Links to approved [BCBSTX HealthSelect](#) HRA and detailed instructions for FRT and Wellness Leave can be found on the HR website on the [Health and Wellness page](#).

Note: Upon completion of the HRA, an employee may receive a personalized report, which can be shared with their doctor during the physical exam. **The employee should not share the completed HRA with their supervisor or with Human Resources, and also should not share the personalized report with their supervisor or with Human Resources.** The employee should save a copy of the HRA completion certificate/email, as it will be needed later to submit to HR with the affidavit as part of the application process.

2. The employee prints the [Health Risk Assessment and Physician’s Certification of Routine Physical Exam Affidavit](#).
3. The employee schedules and receives a “comprehensive physical exam” (as defined by this policy) with their Primary Care Physician’s office using sick leave.
4. The employee provides the Primary Care Physician with the [Completed Health Risk Assessment and Physician’s Certification of Routine Physical Exam Affidavit](#) and

ensures that the Primary Care Physician has signed/stamped the “Physician’s Certification of Routine Physical Exam” portion of the affidavit.

5. Once the proper paperwork is obtained, the employee informs the supervisor of meeting the qualifications for Wellness Leave and submits the [Completed Health Risk Assessment and Physician’s Certification of Routine Physical Exam Affidavit](#) to the supervisor for signature.
6. After the signature is obtained, the employee scans and submits the HRA completion certificate/e-mail and affidavit to HR via POWERUP@uh.edu.
7. Human Resources reviews the documentation and if all requirements are met, notifies the employee and the employee’s supervisor via e-mail of the employee’s successful completion of the requirements for eight (8) hours of wellness leave. This notification provides guidance for both the employee and the supervisor in regard to how the leave should be processed in TRAM.
8. If all requirements for the leave incentive have not been met, Human Resources informs the employee and employee’s supervisor by e-mail, and indicates the next steps to be taken to meet requirements.
9. Note Wellness Leave may only be awarded once in a calendar year and only after the requirements have been met.

VI. RECORD KEEPING

- A. Record keeping requirements for Wellness Leave are the same as record keeping for vacation and sick leave, except that this leave should be designated as wellness leave on all payroll documents.
- B. Documents containing personal medical information should not be submitted to Human Resources or shared with the employee’s supervisor at any time. Records required for program compliance (Completed Health Risk Assessment and Physician’s Certification of Routine Physical Exam Affidavit, Medical Clearance, etc.) are to be maintained in separate confidential files; these records are not to be integrated into personnel files in order to maintain employee confidentiality.

VII. REVIEW AND RESPONSIBILITY

Responsible Party: Associate Vice President for Human Resources

Review: Every five years

VIII. APPROVAL

/Raymond Bartlett/

Senior Vice President for Administration and Finance

/Renu Khator/

President

Date of President's Approval: October 14, 2023

IX. REFERENCES

[State Employees Health Fitness and Education Act of 1983, as amended](#)

[SAM 02.E.08 – Employee Health Fitness and Education](#)

[MAPP 02.04.05 - Termination Clearance](#)

[MAPP 02.05.02 - Employee Time Reporting](#)

[MAPP 02.06.01 - Staff Training and Development](#)

[Fitness Release Time \(FRT\) Application](#)

[Physical Activity Readiness Questionnaire \(PAR-Q\)](#)

[Health Risk Assessment and Physician's Certification of Routine Physical Exam Affidavit](#)