

The Big Idea

Q How can busy members of the OU community adopt a healthier lifestyle?

A With help from the OU Wellness program, a holistic approach to health and well-being.

BY CHELSEY KRAFT

One billion, seven hundred fifty-four million, four hundred sixteen-thousand, two hundred seventy.

That's the number of steps University of Oklahoma employees logged in 2017 through the OU Wellness program, which encourages all-around health, complete with hashtag (#LiveYourBestLife). The steps equal a staggering 794,948 miles and 7,038,151 minutes of exercise.

But the impact goes even deeper than physical fitness. The program, which presents "a broad and holistic approach to wellness," follows eight dimensions of health, including physical, occupational, environmental, social, financial, spiritual, emotional and intellectual.

"A lot of people think that it's diet and nutrition, and that's just one of the many aspects of wellness," explains Lisa Millington, chief wellness officer. "What we've tried to do is incorporate all the aspects that contribute to good health in our programming."

Millington, who also serves as special assistant to OU's vice president for Administration and Finance, says that the idea for a wellness program originated with Nick Hathaway, OU's Executive Vice President, Vice President for Administration and Finance and Vice President for Strategic Planning.

The opportunity to head up the OU Wellness program was

a natural fit for Millington and her interests. An attorney who first worked in the OU legal department, Millington says she has been exploring aspects of wellness since high school. She is a certified yoga teacher, wellness coach and personal trainer.

Employees receive incentives as encouragement for participation in programming or exercise. When they attend wellness programs, go to campus activities, log a workout, complete community service or a variety of other tasks, employees can go onto the portal (<http://www.ou.edu/wellness.html>) and claim their points.

These points then turn into rewards. In 2017, the incentives included a free FitBit at sign up for the portal and water bottles and Dri-Fit shirts at certain point milestones. The program also features annual cash awards, with 872 employees reaching the top reward of \$250 after earning 2,000 points by Nov. 30. This year's incentives include a steel mug, Dri-Fit baseball hat and a pullover. The \$250 award will be given to individuals when they hit 4,000 points for the year.

"I think it includes everyone," says Millington about why it was

important to take a holistic approach to the program. "When we were looking for a portal we were told that most companies have a 15 to 20 percent participation rate, but we want everyone to be able to participate in wellness, so that's why we're including all aspects of a healthy lifestyle."



Aaron Lindley

Free giveaways of healthy treats like these berries are offered on "Wellness Wednesdays" at various locations around campus.



Morgan Day

Morning yoga at the Sam Noble Museum is one of many OU Wellness initiatives aimed at providing a healthier lifestyle for members of the university family.

Nearly 3,700 employees are registered on the portal. Millington says this is close to 75 percent of OU employees, adding that OU Wellness has received positive feedback and has been very successful to date.

“One of the biggest factors in wellness is social interaction and connections. That’s even more important than nutrition and exercise,” Millington explains. “We try to help people feel connected through our portal and through our programs.”

The OU Wellness programming is extensive, including Lunch & Learns, Wellness Wednesdays, wellness classes, biometric screenings and physicals, flu shots and health risk assessments – all at no cost to benefits-eligible employees on the Norman campus.

Lunch & Learns are a time for employees to get together and explore different topics from “Etiquette Tips and Tricks”

to “Resistance Training Across the Lifespan” to “Nine Things Every Employee Should Know About Money.”

“If someone wants a Lunch & Learn on a certain topic, we have the entire campus as a resource,” Millington explains. “If someone wants a Lunch & Learn on sleep, for example, it’s really easy for us to find someone to come talk on that.”

For example, a business professor utilizing the portal says

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she taught a meditation class during a Lunch & Learn. Tom Wavering, who is the executive director of OU’s Innovation Hub, taught a farm-to-family session.

“That is one thing we wanted — to use the resources that we have here at OU,” Millington shares. “We don’t go outside



Aaron Lindley

From left, student employees Michael Bengah and Lejla Sisic; graduate housing advisers Riian Whitby and CeCe Craft; and graduation coach Katrechia Hardy transplant take-home succulents during a “Lunch & Learn” activity. OU Wellness puts an emphasis on the importance of social contact as part of a healthy lifestyle.

the university, we really haven’t had to, which is super cool. We also have lots of Ph.D. and master’s students who teach our Lunch & Learns. They’re getting that great experience, and we’re getting a young, dynamic speaker.”

On Wellness Wednesdays, employees can enjoy events and programming at various spots on campus. These have included a make-your-own bug repellent session and a pumpkin party complete with healthy pumpkin snacks and decorating. Another popular session is blood pressure Wellness Wednesday at which people have their blood pressure taken and are then treated to green tea and dark chocolate.

For year two, Millington says the goal is to continue to grow and evolve the program. A key part of this is the employee portal, which links participants to healthy food discounts and online programming, like recorded Lunch & Learns.

A programming theme ties in with each month. For December, the focus was, “Giving Back,” including a Wednesday where employees brought a new toy or gift for a child in need. In January, the theme was, “Goal Setting.”

Making this happen for OU employees has truly taken a collaborative effort among various groups on campus. Millington’s team consists of Aaron Lindley, a marketing specialist who administers the portal, and Debra Levy Martinelli,

who also works in Hathaway’s office. Additionally, there are the original stakeholder departments and their employees who partnered on the project from the beginning. These include OU Alumni, the Department of Health and Exercise Science, Financial Education Services, OU Fitness and Recreation, OU Graduate College, OU Health Services, OU Leadership and Volunteerism, the Office of the Provost, ONE University Store and University Research Campus.

“These collaborators were key to the program’s foundation and success,” Millington says. “It has fingers everywhere.”

“You’ll be walking across campus and see people with their FitBit or having walking meetings, and it’s really neat,” she says. “Everywhere you go you get a positive reaction and we’ve enjoyed seeing that.”

Millington adds that OU Wellness welcomes ideas and input from others in the OU community.

“We want everyone to be involved,” she says. “We welcome new participants and ideas. The program is constantly evolving and that’s what we want. It’s going to look different each semester and we like that.”

Chelsey Kraft is a marketing/PR specialist for the University of Oklahoma.