Take Charge

a Wellness Connection newsletter

May 2013

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Don't let stress take over your life.

Staying organized, sticking to a schedule, exercising regularly, and practicing relaxation exercises can help reduce stress.

Manage your stress, feel better, and reduce your risk for emotional and health problems.

Live stress-free, not stressed-out.

What's going on with wellness?

The wellness team is revamping programs to fit all lifestyles. Take advantage of health seminars, competitions, fitness classes and health assessments to improve your everyday health. Look for more information coming soon.

DiscoverHealth with the Wellness Connection

Open Enrollment is over

Active open enrollment ended April 15. All benefits are effective May 1, 2013. For questions concerning your chosen medical plan contact HR Benefits customer service at benefits@houstontx.gov or 713-837-9400.

DiscoverHealth Open Enrollment for City of Houston employees

More springtime allergy tips

Reducing your exposure to pollen, the most common springtime allergen, can help manage your allergy symptoms. Here are some tips to follow to avoid triggering your allergies:

- If possible, limit outdoor activities on dry, windy days. Instead, plan outdoor

DiscoverEAP Employee Assistance Program

Expanded Services

Simplify your life with support from EAP.

Employees and dependents now have access to:

- Confidential counseling 24-hours, seven days a week
- Two onsite counselors
- More than 2,000 mental health professionals
- Financial information resources
- Legal support resources
- Work-Life solutions
- Online solutions
- "Ask the Expert"

Call anytime: 855-378-7485

TDD: 800-697-0353

See a complete list of EAP services.

To access online EAP resources visit guidanceresources.com and click on first time user. Register with the Organization Web **ID: HOUSTONEAP.**

Flexing for joint health

Bend, turn and wiggle.

No, it's not the latest dance craze.

Your joints help you bend your elbows, turn your head, and wave your fingers, according to WebMD.

Very important but often overlooked, joint health is not supported with huge wellness campaigns like cancer, heart diseases, or diabetes. But you can protect your joints with everyday healthy habits. Reduce your

activities after it rains. The rain clears pollen from the air.

- Avoid mowing the lawn, weed pulling and gardening activities that loosen up pollen grains.
- Remove clothes you've worn outside and shower to remove pollen from your skin and hair.
- Don't hang laundry outside. Pollen grains can stick to sheets, towels and clothing.
- Wear a dust mask when doing outside chores.

Free YMCA classes now available

The Wellness Connection has partnered with the YMCA to host fitness classes at city facilities, free of charge to city employees. Find a class you like, show up, and get fit! Class sizes are limited, so show up early to get your spot.

Free YMCA classes

**Please note maximum participants for each class.*

Beginner Zumba
8504 Schuller Rd
Monday 5 – 6 p.m.
Wednesday & Friday, 4 – 5 p.m.
**Maximum 25 participants.*

1200 Travis, 22nd floor gym
Monday & Wednesday, 5:30 – 6:30 p.m.
**Maximum 20 participants*

62 Reisner
Tuesday & Thursday, 5:30 – 6:30 p.m.
**Maximum 25 participants*

Beginner Bootcamp
1200 Travis, 22nd floor gym
Tuesday & Thursday, 5:30 – 6:30 p.m.
**Maximum 20 participants*

Beginner Line Dancing
500 McKinney
Tuesday, noon - 1 p.m.
Thursday, 12:30 - 1:30 p.m.
**Maximum 20 participants.*

Line Dancing
Wednesday & Friday, noon - 1 p.m.
611 Walker, 4th floor, Civil Service Conference room
**Maximum 20 participants*

Beginner Yoga
8000 N. Stadium, 2nd floor conf. room
Tuesday &Thursday, noon to 1 p.m.
**Maximum 25 participants.*

MS150

risk of joint injuries and arthritis with these simple joint health tips:

Get moving. Keeping your joints flexible will reduce stiffness, according to WebMD. Make sure to change positions when sitting, working, reading or watching TV. And take breaks during long periods of sitting. You can increase flexibility with stretching. But don't stretch before your body is warmed up. "Cold stretching" can lead to injuries, according to WebMD. Walk around or jog in place before stretching to loosen joints up.

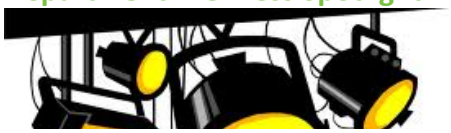
Reduce wear and tear. Sound like an extended warranty agreement? Think in terms of body agreement. Staying at a healthy weight, getting regular exercise, and building muscles around joints will prevent injuries and reduce your risk of developing arthritis, according to WebMD. Less weight means less stress on your joints and regular exercise keeps joints moving and builds muscle.

Drink your milk. Milke is not just for kids, it's a great source of Vitamin D and calcium for building strong bones. Strong bones can help prevent falls and joint injuries, according to WebMD. Get your daily dose with low-fat dairy products. Ask your doctor about supplements if necessary.

Build your core. Regular core (abs, back and hip) exercises will build your balance, reduce your risk of falls and help prevent joint injuries, according to WebMD. Build your core with abdominal crunches, planks, or hip and back exercises. Want step-by-step instructions for core exercises? Log on to the Mayo Clinic for a core exercise slide show. Always consult your doctor before beginning any workout regimen.

Don't over do it. Working out doesn't mean pushing yourself beyond your limits. Correct form with a full range of motion is more effective than working out until you almost pass out. Opt for controlled smooth exercises when focusing on joint health. If you experience pain, stop the exercise and give yourself a break. Ice injuries and see your doctor if pain persists. Tearing or injuring joints or ligaments can lead to permanent joint problems. Know your limits and stick to them.

Department Wellness Spotlight



City MS150 team riders at the midpoint in LaGrange, Texas

Congratulations to the 2013 city of Houston cycling team members who rode from Houston to Austin during the two-day fundraising event. Together, the team rode more than 1,000 miles and raised more than $8,000 to fight multiple sclerosis.

A big kudos to Director of Housing and Community Development Neal Rackleff. He completed the ride in one day!

City employees included:

- Antoinette Jenkins, Library
- Bruce Haupt, Finance
- Christopher Gonzales, Finance
- CP Yang, Human and Health Services
- Heidi Bane, Human Resources
- James Koski, Mayor's Office
- Janice Evans-Davis, Mayor's Office
- Malcolm Eisenberg, Human Resources
- Mark F. Kirschke, City Council
- Neal James Rackleff, Housing and Community Development
- Omar C. Reid, Human Resources
- Pete Garcia, Public Works

- Pete Palerno, Public Works
- Steve Girandi, General Services
- Thomas Eaton, Library
- Travis Hooper, Housing and Community Development
- William-Paul Dunbar Thomas, Mayor's Office

Weight Watchers

You can sign up for Weight Watchers at a discount with no joining fee, thanks to the city Wellness Connection initiative.
You can pay the monthly-pass fee of $39.99 plus tax with a debit or credit card, and the card information will be used for your pass to be automatically renewed each month until you cancel it.

Come to the following meeting to find out more and talk with a Weight Watchers instructor.

Every Thursday
9:45 - 10:45 a.m.
1200 Travis St., 24th floor, ADR conference room

Or sign up today for your monthly pass:

- Log on to https://wellness.weightwatchers.com
- Enter the following
  - Company ID: **56929**

Route 66

Route 66 is now going on in the Solid Waste Department as an internal competition. Stay tuned to see which service center will win.

Office of Business Opportunity

OBO's Walking Campaign Challenge has ended. The Wellness Team salutes division manager Morris Scott for stepping more than one million steps during the 8-week challenge. Collectively, OBO took more than seven million steps. Way to go OBO!

ARA vs. SWD

The ARA and SWD will begin the "Battle of the Executives" this month to see which team shows the most improvement in their health status during a 12-week challenge! Stay tuned for updates.

24-hour health information line

Call the Cigna customer service line, 800-997-1406, to talk to a nurse about health issues, get assistance, or access a health information audio library to learn about a wide range of health topics. Registered nurses will speak with you 24 hours a day.

Get help:

- Locating doctors or pharmacies if you're away from home.
- About emergency services if you need emergency care.
- Answering questions about your symptoms.
- On self or professional care.

Cigna's customer service line number is located on your Cigna health insurance card.

        - Company pass code: **ww56929**
    - Sign up for a location convenient for you.

If you have any problems purchasing your monthly pass, please call Weight Watchers at 866-204-2885.