



April 2024

NOW it's Spring!

Iowans experienced some great wintertime temperatures this year, teasing many of us into an extended case of spring fever. With threats of snow likely behind us, we can now truly experience all the beauty of the season. Enjoy this issue of the *Healthy State of Iowa Employees* newsletter which highlights some of the activities we enjoy most this time of year, including opportunities to make a difference in the community when you are needed most.

Strut into Spring

As the flowers bloom and the sun shines brighter, there's no better time to lace up your sneakers and hit the pavement or trails. And most will agree, it's even better if you can do it with a furry friend.

May marks the start of Live Healthy Iowa's *Strut Your Pup* challenge, an initiative dedicated to promoting the health benefits of dog walking for both you and your canine companion.

By committing to regular walks, you and your pup not only reap the physical benefits, but you'll also experience a boost in mood and mental clarity. Walking has been shown to reduce stress, anxiety, and depression, making it an excellent way to enhance your mental health.

So, put on your walking shoes, grab your pet's leash, and get ready to strut into spring with your furry companion by your side. Join us for the [Strut Your Pup](#) challenge and discover the joys of walking for a healthier happier you! Registration is open now!



Well-Being Webinars Offer Wealth of Information

Through the work of the Healthy State of Iowa Employees initiative, the Department of Administrative Services has partnered with Wellmark to provide on-demand, well-being webinars throughout 2024. These webinars focus on behavior change, time management, physical activity, and holiday stress.

Webinar information will be sent to agency Wellness Champions to share with co-workers each quarter, and will also be linked in this newsletter. The first quarter webinar, [Behavior Change and the Brain](#), may be viewed whenever it's convenient for you!



Staff Spotlight

Name: Liz McDowell

Current Position: Employee Health & Wellness Intern - Department of Transportation

Years with State: 5 months

My Healthy Choice: Nutrition

“As I have gotten older, I realize how the food I consume affects my day-to-day life. Opting for whole foods over heavily processed ones leaves me feeling energized, focused, and alert. This allows me to show up as the best version of myself to school and work. My grocery staples include eggs, chicken, beef, bananas, and sweet potatoes! I also prioritize drinking plenty of water, aiming for more than 120 ounces each day. Along with this, I've recently started to work at lowering my caffeine intake.

While I do prioritize healthy eating, I still eat a lot of yummy food! I love going out and trying new foods with family and friends, and I will never pass up an ice cream treat. I've learned it's important to find a balance between nourishing my body and enjoying all the delicious foods I love.

A great way to maintain this balance is to improve your cooking skills so every meal is a treat. I always take advantage of the internet to find recipes and meal ideas. If you've been struggling to get nutrient dense foods in your diet, I recommend searching for simple recipes that can show you just how easy it can be to prioritize nutrition.”

Hydration is Essential – Fill Up Your Water Bottle!

Research has shown three out of every four Americans are chronically dehydrated. That's a staggering number. Our bodies are primarily made of water, and drinking at least eight glasses a day goes a long way toward preventing dehydration.

Being well hydrated impacts our brain and body in many ways, including:

- Improved concentration, memory, and mood.
- Increased energy
- Improved digestion; fewer kidney stones and urinary tract infections
- Cushioning the joints in your body
- Stopping or lessening headaches
- Better heart health - dehydration impairs the ability of the heart to function properly
- Body temperature regulation - staying well hydrated helps with sweat production and cools the body down



to help prevent heat stroke and other heat-related illnesses.

- **Weight management** - drinking water before each meal and replacing caloric beverages with water has been shown to reduce body weight and impact body composition

Are you ready to challenge yourself to drink more water? Register for Live Healthy Iowa's [Burst Your Thirst](#) challenge. This fun four-week challenge encourages teams (two to 10 people) to track activity minutes and water consumption through the [Live Healthy Iowa](#) website. Registration is now open.



The Power of Being a Disaster Response Volunteer

In times of disaster, volunteers play a pivotal role in restoring communities and ensuring the health and wellbeing of those impacted. However, effective volunteering requires adherence to certain guidelines to ensure safety and efficacy of the efforts. Here are some important things to note:

1. **It's crucial not to self-deploy.** Instead, individuals should follow local guidance about where and when volunteers are needed. Emergency personnel often need to secure affected areas first, such as clearing downed power lines, before it's safe for volunteers to enter.
2. **Cash donations are preferred** over material goods as they allow relief organizations to purchase exactly what is needed, supporting local economies and ensuring efficient resource allocation. Be sure to look for trusted and established organizations who are accepting donations. A list of most organizations who are active in disasters in Iowa can be found at the IDHRC.org.
3. **Prioritize privacy and safety** when seeking volunteer assistance for vulnerable individuals like the elderly. Instead of sharing their information publicly on social media, direct communication with trusted local organizations or local emergency management is recommended.
4. **Volunteers are often needed most after the publicity and news teams leave.** If you're interested in serving your community during times of disaster, consider [pre-registering](#) as a volunteer through a local response organization or at <https://www.volunteeriowa.org>. Those who pre-register can then be contacted when additional assistance is needed, with details about how and where to help.

Volunteering in disaster situations is impactful, but it must be done thoughtfully and responsibly. It takes a community's collective effort to return an area to a new normal after a disaster. By following these guidelines, individuals can maximize their positive impact and contribute to resilient communities in times of need.

Take Action!

- May is Mental Health Awareness Month. Check out the Healthiest State Initiative's [Make It Ok](#) campaign to learn more and see how you could get involved.
- [SEHARC](#) (State of Iowa Health and Recreation Committee) connects you with offers for discounted tickets to area events and hosts fun activities throughout the year. If you are interested in receiving information on these opportunities, complete [this form](#) to be added to SEHARC's mailing list or follow them on Facebook!
- Check out the DAS [Employee Assistance Program](#) (EAP) for a number of on-demand seminars covering various topics related to health and well-being. EAP also offers confidential resources at no cost to help employees and eligible family members address challenges.
- For more great information, be sure to check out these Wellmark publications - [Wellmark Blue Magazine](#) and [Blue at Work](#).

To learn more about how Healthy EmployeesSM Powered by Wellmark is working with the State of Iowa to make the healthy choices easier for you, visit the [DAS Health and Well-Being webpage](#).

The Healthy State of Iowa Employees quarterly newsletter is a cooperative effort between the Department of Administrative Services, Wellmark, and the State of Iowa Wellness Champions' Education and Engagement Committee. It's designed to help keep State of Iowa employees connected and informed of wellness opportunities around the state.

If you have questions or suggestions for future content, please contact us at healthyemployees@iowa.gov.