



Wellness Policy and Guidelines:

Making Healthy Options Available for All

(updated 9/16)



Why do we need a Wellness Policy?

The goal of this policy is to make it easier for San Mateo County employees and residents to make healthy choices. Improving our food and physical activity environments so that the healthy choice is the easy choice can reduce the rates of many of our most costly and debilitating chronic diseases, such as heart disease, diabetes and obesity, and improve the quality of life. San Mateo County is serving as a model for other organizations and communities by improving access to healthy food choices and encouraging residents and employees to be physically active.

Who was involved in writing the Policy and when was it passed?

In 2009, a Joint Labor-Management Committee was convened to discuss health care cost increases and to make recommendations to the County Manager about what should be done to reduce costs. The committee concluded that the County should do more to improve the health of its workforce, and to create a “Culture of Health” that supports employee’s healthy choices during the workday. With these recommendations in mind, the Wellness Policy was drafted. The committee surveyed employees and held focus groups, met with food service operators and facility managers, talked with union representatives and department heads. The final draft of the Policy was approved by the County Board of Supervisors on April 12, 2011.

What does this policy mean to County employees?

This policy means that there will be healthy choices in cafeterias and at all County or Department- sponsored functions where food is served. More fruits and vegetables, whole grains, low or no calorie drinks such as water, and low fat items will be served. Vending machines will stock healthy items at County-owned facilities. There will be more opportunities and incentives to be physically active throughout the workday, including meetings and trainings. For example, employees are encouraged to use part of their break or lunch time for physical activity and those who schedule and lead meetings lasting more than one hour are asked to include a stretch/exercise break on the agenda.

What does this policy mean to County residents?

Residents who attend County-sponsored events or enter County facilities will observe healthier food choices at events, healthier food options in cafeterias and vending machines, and opportunities to be physically activity at meetings. They may notice more signage in County buildings encouraging stairwell use or promoting safe walking routes. Over time, they may come to realize that entire campuses have become smoke-free.

What are my responsibilities as a County employee in implementing this policy?

We all have a role to promote a “Culture of Health” in our own departments and in the community. For example, Department Directors and managers are asked to follow nutrition guidelines when their staff purchase or order food for meetings and events. The policy encourages them to support flexible work schedules to allow employees to exercise at lunch and to participate in wellness events. Co-workers can support one another by forming walking groups or finding other ways to be physically active together, encouraging healthy food and beverage choices, and participating in sponsored wellness events. When employees plan future celebrations or department activities, health should be a consideration. You are encouraged to make healthy choices during your workday – nourish your body by choosing healthy snacks and beverages, step away from

your work routine by taking an active workbreak or socializing with colleagues, and finding moments during your day to relax, refresh and refocus.

What are the key sections of the policy?

Food & Nutrition: Nutrition standards are based on the USDA Dietary Guidelines for Americans. You'll see healthy food options at department and County meetings and trainings. Those who plan County-sponsored meetings and events in the community are expected to follow the nutrition guidelines when selecting food and beverages. Health information (e.g. calories, fat, sodium, etc.) is posted to guide consumers in making healthy choices in cafeterias, at vending machines, etc. Contracted food service operators and vending machine operators in County facilities are expected to follow the County's nutrition standards, which also includes serving appropriate portion sizes and using local and sustainable food products. Organizers of County-supported fundraisers are asked to ensure that healthy food options are available, whether events are on site or are sponsored by the County off site.

Physical Activity: Employees are encouraged to use their daily breaks and meal periods to be physically active, and may request a flexible work schedule to be able to do so. Opportunities for increasing physical activity during the work day are promoted (e.g. walking meetings, taking stairs instead of the elevator, bike/walk to work, and including stretch breaks at meetings that last more than one hour).

Tobacco: Employees and/or family members who smoke are encouraged to quit smoking. The County is actively working to eliminate smoking on all County property.

Mental Well Being (Work-Life Balance and Stress Management): Employees are encouraged to request and Supervisors/Managers are encouraged to consider flexible working arrangements consistent with the County's and/or Department's flex time guidelines and policies.

Employee Engagement, Education and Training: Employees are encouraged to participate in health trainings, programs and activities sponsored by the County or their department. The Policy sets a target that employees participate in at least four hours of County or Department-sponsored wellness trainings, programs or activities each fiscal year. County or Department-sponsored wellness training, programs and activities are conducted on County time with supervisor approval.

Physical Work Environment: When selecting future building sites or leasing space, the County now considers additional factors such as proximity to public transportation, safe sidewalks, bike routes, onsite or nearby food service, and onsite or nearby fitness facilities.

Modifications to existing buildings such as making stairwells more inviting, posting signs for walking routes, and identifying lactation rooms for all County worksites will be made. It is the long-term goal of the County to ensure that there is a fitness center at every major County worksite.

Where do I find out more?

The County Wellness Committee is charged with the responsibility of overseeing the implementation of the Wellness Policy. Policy implementation is being phased in. The County Wellness Committee includes representatives from County departments, management and union representatives, key County staff and internal experts, and representatives from the County health plans and EAP.

For more information, visit our website to learn more about our efforts: <http://hr.smcgov.org/county-wellness-committee> . For additional questions, contact the Employee Wellness Program (wellness@smcgov.org, or 363-4315)