



October 2023

It's a Great Time for a Fall Reset

After a flurry of spring and summer activity, fall is a great time to reset some of your health routines and figure out how to continue them into the colder months ahead. 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.

Keeping Holiday Stress at Bay

Some people look forward to the holidays all year long, while others see the holiday season approaching and are overcome with a sense of dread. "Will life become so hectic that I can't enjoy the holidays? How can I avoid overspending again this year? How will I ever get everything done? How many pounds will I gain this year? Will the family get along?"



The list could go on and on but these questions, if left unanswered, can lead to the same thing . . . an overload of stress! Read Kepro's [Keeping Holiday Stress at Bay](#) for useful tips to manage your stress throughout the upcoming holiday season.

The Real Impact of Volunteering as You Get Older

Volunteering can be one of the most enriching and meaningful experiences you can have as you age, offering the chance to give back to the community, share skills and wisdom, and create lasting social connections. Volunteering can reignite a sense of purpose and fulfillment, promoting mental and emotional wellness while greatly reducing the risk of loneliness and depression. It's an opportunity to explore new interests, stay mentally sharp, and maintain an active and healthy lifestyle.

Encouraging your older friends and family members to volunteer is a wonderful way to spread the benefits and joy of this experience. Older volunteers bring a unique perspective and skills to their roles. Past experience can be invaluable in mentoring younger generations, offering guidance and wisdom that can help shape the future. Overall, volunteering not only benefits the community but also contributes significantly to one's own individual physical and mental well-being.

Interested in learning more about volunteer opportunities in your area? Visit our [GetConnected](#) database to explore opportunities, and learn more about [AmeriCorps Seniors](#) and their programs

throughout Iowa.



Staff Spotlight

Name: Michael Rojas

Current Position: Disaster Program Officer, Volunteer Iowa

Years with the State: Almost 3 years

My Healthy Choice: Running

“As a kid growing up in New York City, you get used to going fast. Getting to where you need to be yesterday and maintaining a high level of energy was always innately the culture of the city. Even so, I never used to enjoy running; it was always a chore my brother would spring on me, and I would grumble through. Surprisingly, it rapidly turned into a passion of mine when I went to college and it improved not only my physical health but my emotional and mental health as

well. I like to view it as a form of meditation, or a good conversation with yourself wherever and whenever you want.

Through my work with Volunteer Iowa, I respond to natural disasters locally and nationally, working with emergency management and other partners. I love my work, but running is a reprieve from the daily grind in some pretty stressful environments. I am grateful I get to explore and enjoy new environments through the lens of my work and running. A run can be anything you want it to be and fill up whatever cup you need it to that day. It’s unabashedly pro YOU! No judgment, no parameters, no barrier to entry. You just get out there and go!

Whatever pace you would like to go, the finish line is always in sight. The running community is so welcoming and encouraging no matter where you are in your journey. Whether you’re starting that first mile or finishing a marathon, it always leaves you with a vibrant energy that is infectious. Get out there and run!”

Minestrone Soup - Flavors in the Colors of Fall

Do autumn’s pretty burnished colors and cooler temperatures inspire you to change up your meal-planning this time of year? Does your mind turn to cool weather comfort foods like chili or your favorite casseroles?

One healthy and easy-to-make dinner to consider is minestrone soup, a hearty Italian stew of pasta and vegetables that can be adapted to any family’s preferences. Iowa State University Extension and Outreach offers a healthy and delicious recipe for [Minestrone Soup](#) that the whole family will love!

Popular flavor enhancers include adding a parmesan rind or the last few leaves of your summer basil plant while the soup simmers. You may even consider adding chicken or sausage for more protein and flavor. One last great tip to prevent soggy pasta in your soup is to cook the pasta (or rice) separately and add to each bowl with the soup at the table.





Five Important Benefits of Outdoor Time, No Matter the Season

Spending time outside, no matter what the weather, has important benefits for the entire family. Research shows that being outdoors often helps affect more meaningful human connections, promotes better sleep, and fosters creativity. Other benefits of spending time outside include:

1. **Sunshine.** Sunshine is crucial to good health, and countless studies show that sunshine is the best source of Vitamin D, a proven immune booster.
2. **Exercise.** A daily tour in nature, whether on a sidewalk around your workplace, on a bike trail or at a local park, can improve immunity, be effective in lowering high blood pressure, and keep joints flexible.
3. **Relaxation.** Involving all of your senses outside is a way to momentarily break free from the constant engagement found with coworkers, family, busy schedules, and devices. Rather than defaulting to earphones, listen to nature. Quietness can reduce anxiety levels and improve your mood.
4. **Cleaning up.** Yard work is exercise and also a chance to check on the condition of your home's exterior. If you don't have a yard, volunteer to help those who are unable to rake leaves and prepare their own yards for winter.
5. **Scoring with your kids.** During half-time or after a football game, kids love when you play with them as they imitate their heroes on the field.

Well-Being Webinars Offered

Through the work of the Healthy State of Iowa Employees team, the Department of Administrative Services has partnered with Wellmark to provide on-demand well-being webinars throughout 2023. These webinars focus on physical activity, the benefits of social connection, financial security, and emotional balance.

Webinar links will be sent to agency Wellness Champions to share with co-workers each quarter, and may also be accessed below:

- [Fitness at All Ages and Abilities](#) (40 minutes)
- [Sleep 101](#) (50 minutes)
- [Sustainability and Health](#) (35 minutes)
- [Mindfulness and Your Mental Health](#) (60 minutes)

Visit the [DAS Health and Well-Being web page](#) for previous editions of the *Healthy State of Iowa Employees* newsletter and other great health-related information.

Take Action!

- Registration for Live Healthy Iowa's [10 Week Wellness Challenge](#) will open in December!

- [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.