



Monthly Challenges

You can keep up motivation and morale for a department health and fitness program by making it a challenge among department members. Consider issuing a new health and wellness challenge each month to your department members. Winners of the monthly challenge could receive any number of rewards – from recognition at a department event or on a department bulletin board or newsletter, to a printed award certificate, to a token gift. Local business owners may even be willing to donate products or gift certificates to give to the monthly challenge winners.

January: All Year Long Resolutions

The holiday season has come to an end, and a new year has begun. Membership at gyms will increase, people will buy new workout gear, commit stop eating dessert, and make efforts to quit smoking.

We all know that the key to lifestyle change is to, well...change your lifestyle. The collective groans can be heard around the country, but these changes do not have to be painful or difficult to keep up. You can gradually take steps to achieve your desired goal results – whether it is to lose 30 pounds or to just exercise twice more each week.

This month's challenge is not one that simply lasts a month – it's a challenge to create realistic, healthy goals for yourself that are achieved by creating a game plan so that the changes you make are long-lasting.

Tips for Success

- Know the steps you need to take to make your own challenge a success.
- Gather the support you need from your friends, family, and co-workers.
- Give yourself a chance – simply by beginning you have taken a big step toward creating a healthy habit.
- Take things one day at a time. If you miss a workout or three or eat something you wish you had not, forgive yourself and start again.
- If you have negative connotations with exercise or eating certain foods, find a way to make it positive for yourself so it is not a chore or a punishment. Erase “I have to” or “I need to” from your vocabulary. Remind yourself that you want to take these steps so you can achieve your goals.

Try filling out the [Heart-Healthy Firefighter Contract](#) so you can document your goals and keep track of your progress.

February: Get Screened

This month, challenge your department members to get screened and know their risk for heart attack, high blood pressure, cholesterol, and more. Being a first responder puts you at increased risk for many health concerns, including heart attack. The strenuous duties of emergency response places increased demands on firefighters' bodies, which may not be physically prepared for the strain. It is important for you to know your risk factors – professional, lifestyle, and hereditary – so you can take the necessary steps to prevent a serious illness before it happens. Once you know your risks, you can work with your doctor or healthcare provider to develop a wellness plan that is right for you.

Challenge Rules

1. If you have not had a full physical in the past year, schedule one as soon as possible. If you have had one more recently, find your test results.
2. Use the information your doctor gave you to develop a health and fitness plan. Did you have a risk of high cholesterol? Make preemptive changes now. Are you slightly overweight? Make changes in your diet now to get back on track. Make sure and talk to you doctor about your wellness plan. For additional information, visit web sites like the [National Volunteer Fire Council](#), [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#), and the [National Heart, Lung and Blood Institute](#).
3. You have completed the challenge once you have had your annual screening and have a plan in place to maintain or adopt a healthy lifestyle.

To encourage your department members, try sending out weekly emails with success stories of individuals who caught a disease in the early stages through health screenings. Send out information on the types of screenings recommended for different age groups. Set up a bulletin board with risk factor and screening guidelines information.

March: National Nutrition Month

Challenge your department members to focus on an all-around healthy diet during [National Nutrition Month](#)[®]. Held each March, National Nutrition Month is a nutrition education and information campaign created by the Academy of Nutrition and Dieticians to focus attention on the importance of making informed food choices and developing sound eating and physical activity habits.

Challenge Rules

1. Start by making a plan. Think about which areas you need to improve on. Should you focus on cutting out sugars? Do you need to stay away from fried food? Record your goals so you do not forget them. Make sure to include a variety of colorful fruits and vegetables each day in addition to your other goals.

2. Record what you eat each day.
3. At the end of the Month, look back at your progress. You have completed the challenge if you have five out of seven days each week with an overall healthy diet (including at least five servings of fruits and veggies and avoiding your problem foods).

To motivate your department members, try sending out weekly emails with new recipes, motivational messages and quotes, and food substitution ideas. Tip sheets, handouts, games, a social media planning kit, and more are available [here](#).

April: Stand Up for Heart Health

April is Foot Health Awareness Month, so this is a great time to on your feet! There are many different exercises that can be performed on your feet and without the need of any exercise equipment, including walking, running, hiking, and various team sports. Chores such as mopping the floors or washing and waxing the apparatus at your station are also great ways to get exercise.

Getting up on your feet and exercising can be very beneficial to your body and health. Exercising can reduce stress, strengthen your bones, burn calories, tone your muscles, and lower your risk of chronic diseases. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and the American College of Sports Medicine recommend that adults get at least 30 minutes of moderate physical activity on most (preferably all) days of the week to improve health.

Challenge Rules

1. Choose an activity that you can do on your feet for 30 minutes.
2. Log the activity you completed and the duration.
3. Strive for as many different activities throughout the month as possible.
4. You have successfully completed this challenge when you have reached 20 days with at least 30 minutes of exercise within the month of April.

To motivate your department members, try sending out weekly emails with different types of activities to do your feet, motivational messages and quotes, and exercise tips. Seek out ways to exercise as a department, such as group walks and/or runs, basketball games, and hiking trips. Install a basketball hoop or a volleyball net at your firehouse. Put up a bulletin board with tips for exercising in the station. Check out the [American Podiatric Medical Association](#) for information on general foot health.

May: Walk It Off

May is [National Physical Fitness and Sports Month](#), the perfect time to challenge your department to get fit.

Walking may seem easy, but according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, a 154-pound person burns 280 calories an hour walking at even a moderate pace. The weather is warmer but not yet into the dog days of summer, making a walk around the neighborhood a great option. You can also walk on a treadmill indoors, or just around the department. Try parking at the back of the parking lot when you go to the store, or taking the stairs instead of the elevator.

To start the challenge, make sure every department member has access to a pedometer. Most smartphones and smart watches have pedometers built in. Alternatively, you can search online for [basic pedometers](#).

Challenge Rules

1. Reset your pedometer each morning when you get out of bed. Before going to sleep at night, record your total number of steps.
2. Each week, calculate your total of steps for the week before.
3. You have completed the challenge if your total number of steps increases each of the four weeks during the challenge.

To motivate your department members, try sending out weekly emails with motivational messages and quotes, set up a group walk in a local park or near the station, and award a prize to the person with the most steps during the month. Put up a leaderboard in the station and update the top three each week to increase competition.

June: Training

Challenge your department members to seek opportunities to improve their health and safety knowledge. There are many free webinars and other online trainings available. The NVFC currently offers courses through the [NVFC Virtual Classroom](#). Online training lets first responders learn about health and safety at their convenience.

Challenge Rules

1. Visit emergency responder training web sites and select webinars or videos that fit your training needs.
2. Register for webinars or other online training. Write down the name of the training, who the training was through (i.e., NVFC or other organizations), and the date of completion. Make sure to keep any certificates or quiz results you receive at the end of each training.
3. The challenge is complete when you have completed at least one training a week for four weeks.

To encourage your department members, send out links to online training platforms, including sites such as the [NVFC](#), [International Association of Fire Chiefs](#), [FireRescue1.com](#), and [FireEngineering.com](#). Check in weekly to see if anyone has taken a webinar they would

recommend to the group. Schedule a time to watch a training video or webinar together at the station. Ask department members to report on what they learned at the next meeting.

July: Stay Hydrated

With summer in full swing, challenge each of your department members to stay hydrated by drinking at least 48 ounces of water per day. Six to eight 8-ounce glasses of water are generally recommended on a daily basis, but individuals should check with their healthcare provider for any special needs. Learn more about water consumption and staying hydrated [here](#).

Challenge Rules

1. Record each time you consume six 8-ounce cups of water, or 48 ounces, using the [Stay Hydrated Progress Log Sheet](#).
2. Only water can be counted toward your six cups.
3. You have successfully completed the challenge when you have consumed six 8-ounce cups of water on at least 20 days during the month of July.

To motivate your department members, try sending out weekly emails with interesting facts about water, tips on staying hydrated, and articles on the benefits of drinking water. Consider providing a reward or certificate for each member who finishes the challenge. If possible, provide each participant with a water bottle with ounces clearly marked that they can refill and carry with them throughout the month.

August: Kick Up Your Cardio

This month, challenge your department members to increase their lung capacity and get their heart rate up through aerobic exercise. Aerobic exercise conditions the heart and lungs by increasing the oxygen available to the body and by helping the heart to use oxygen more efficiently. Aerobic activity, or "cardio," includes everything from running, to mowing the lawn, to dancing – as long as you are doing them at a moderate or vigorous intensity for at least 10 minutes at a time.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, adults need at least two and a half hours moderate-intensity or one hour and fifteen minutes of high-intensity aerobic activity every week (in addition to strength training). [Click here](#) for more information on aerobic activities.

Challenge Rules

1. For the first week, record how much aerobic exercise you are currently getting.
2. Each week, try to increase your time from the week before by at least 20 percent. So, if you jogged and mowed the lawn for a total of five hours last week, try to do about six hours the next week.

3. You have completed the challenge if your total aerobic exercise increases each week of the month.

To motivate your department members, try sending out weekly emails with motivational messages and quotes, sign up for a 5k or other team race event, and coordinate group jogs or walks around the station. Make sure that everyone is tracking their time and consider giving prizes to the winners.

September: 5-A-Day Challenge

Challenge each of your department members to increase their intake of fruits and vegetables a day as part of [Fruit and Veggies – More Matters Month](#).

Fruits and vegetables contain essential vitamins, minerals, and fiber that may help protect you from chronic diseases. Compared with people who consume a diet with only small amounts of fruits and vegetables, those who eat more generous amounts as part of a healthful diet are more likely to have reduced risk of chronic diseases, including stroke, cardiovascular diseases, and certain cancers.

Start the challenge by distributing the [5-A-Day Challenge worksheets](#) and [personal scoresheet](#) from HealthySD.gov to all participants.

Challenge Rules

1. Using the [5-A-Day Challenge worksheet](#), find your baseline number of servings of fruits and vegetables that you currently eat each day.
2. Take stock of your eating habits to determine where you can make changes.
3. Set your goal. Determine how many servings of fruits and vegetables you can realistically strive to eat each day during September.
4. Track the number of servings you eat each day on your [personal scoresheet](#).

To motivate your department members, try sending out weekly emails with tips on [adding more vegetables and fruits into your diet](#), healthy recipes, and motivational messages and quotes. Periodically check in with each participant to see how they are progressing and encourage them to keep going. Organize healthy lunches with your department. Find more nutrition resources on the [Heart-Healthy Firefighter Program](#).

October: Reduce Your Stress

The first full week in October is Mental Illness Awareness Week. In observance of this year's event, challenge your department to reduce their stress levels this month. Every job can cause stress; however, firefighting takes stress to a new level. Each time you get called out to an emergency, you are expected to drop everything to serve your community. This means possibly

missing out on family gatherings and other important events in your life, as well as risking your physical and mental health.

According to American Psychological Association, poorly managed stress can contribute to obesity, increased blood pressure, and increased risk of heart disease. Hobbies and sports can provide a nice distraction from stress and relieve tension; having down-time is important. When it comes to effectively managing stress, recreation is just as important as household chores or bills.

Challenge Rules

Do something for you to clear your mind for at least 20 minutes a day. Whether it's picking up a new hobby or sport, taking your dog for a walk, reading a book outside on a nice day, or going for a run on a treadmill, the point is to clear your mind while doing something you enjoy and getting your mind off of your stressors. You have completed the challenge if you take 20 minutes of relaxation time each day for at least 21 days this month.

Tips to Help Complete Your Challenge

1. If you choose a hobby, match it to your personality. If you are a detail-oriented person, you might like hobbies that require precision, such as welding or working on cars. If you are more spontaneous and like to make a mess, you could try ceramics, gardening, or photography. If you want to get your heart pumping and want to pick up a new sport, try kayaking, rock climbing, or biking.
2. Take a class or join a club to meet other people that enjoy your new hobby or sport. Human beings are social animals, and research shows that socializing with others helps release stress.
3. Make time for your hobby or sport every week and ideally every day. Experts advise meditating for at least 20 minutes a day, so try to do the same to get continuing benefits.
4. Enjoy the process of learning your new hobby or sport. Many people rush to perfection, but the fun and the healing benefits are in the process. That is when you push anger, anxiety, and everyday worries out of the way.
5. Do not be a perfectionist. Give yourself permission to enjoy your hobby without expecting your projects to be masterpieces. If you make it another chore that you must accomplish perfectly, you will lose the therapeutic benefits and the fun.
6. Do not compare yourself to others. If you are a beginner, let yourself be a beginner. Persevere with your hobby because you love it. You do not even have to finish your projects if you don't want to.

November: Put It Out

Smoking cessation is a key component of leading a heart-healthy lifestyle. With heart attack the leading cause of firefighter deaths, and other illnesses such as lung cancer, emphysema, and

chronic bronchitis significant threats to smokers and those exposed to second-hand smoke, leading a smoke-free life is a critical component to keeping first responders safe and healthy.

November is [Lung Cancer Awareness Month](#), a national campaign dedicated to increasing attention to lung cancer issues. In addition, the [Great American Smokeout](#) is the third Thursday in November and encourages smokers use that day to make a plan to quit, or to plan in advance and quit smoking that day. If you smoke, make your plan to quit this month. If you are a nonsmoker, use these events to promote a smoke-free lifestyle in your department.

Challenge Rules

Challenge every department member – smokers and non-smokers – to make your department smoke-free. Direct smokers to the [smoking cessation resources](#) and encourage them to make a plan for a quit date. Nonsmokers can use the information to find out ways to help their department members stop smoking. Leadership can utilize sample no-smoking policies. Everyone wins in this challenge by creating a healthier, stronger department.

December: Holiday Health

It can be hard to focus on your health during the holidays, with plenty of events going on to distract you from working out – not to mention the abundant food at holiday events! During these times, challenge yourself and your department to stay focused on your fitness and nutrition while enjoying all the fun the holidays have to offer.

Working out has many benefits, including decreased risk of disease, increased strength, and reduced stress levels. Eating a well-rounded, healthy diet can also reduce your risk of disease, plus give your body the tools it needs to fight illness. You can still enjoy holiday treats in moderation.

Challenge Rules

1. Have each member of your department log their fitness and nutrition intake information.
2. The challenge is complete if you have logged at least 15 hours of fitness time and reached your nutrition goals 15 days of the month.

To keep your department members motivated, share resources from the [Heart-Healthy Firefighter Program](#).

Additional Challenges

Circuit Training

Challenge your department members to step up their fitness routine and focus on the [Top 10 Exercises for Firefighters](#). For less than \$250, you can implement this 22-minute workout in your department. All you need are resistance bands, PVC pipe of various diameters, carabineers and hooks and bolts, medicine balls, and some items that you can find around your firehouse.

The Top 10 Exercises in the circuit, outlined here, can be modified as needed to fit individual ability level. Use a stopwatch to time 60 seconds for each station, leaving 20 second breaks in between (or modify to 30 seconds each with 10 second breaks). These exercises focus on cardiopulmonary endurance, flexibility, strength, power, and core stability, simulating job tasks and working conditions for firefighters on the job. View the [handout](#) for more information on each exercise, including photos, tips, and sample workouts.

To start the challenge, give each of your department members a copy of the [handout](#).

Challenge Rules

1. Review the handout provided to make sure that you are doing each exercise correctly to maximize impact and minimize injury.
2. Follow the two sample workouts twice each week (follow the number of suggested reps appropriate for your current fitness level) for the month of April. Track your workouts on your calendar.
3. You have completed the challenge if you meet the goal of completing the two sample workouts twice each week for four weeks.

To motivate your department members, try sending out weekly emails with motivational messages and quotes, set up group fitness times, and make a contest to see who can improve most during the month. Put up a bulletin board with photos of the exercises as well as times to work out as a group.

Count Your Zzz's

Challenge each of your department members to improve their sleeping habits as part of National Sleep Awareness Week (occurs in March). The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention states that adults should aim for seven to nine hours of sleep each day. With overnight emergency calls and required "watch" hours, it is often hard for first responders to get the recommended amount of sleep.

Depriving yourself of sleep is not healthy. People who do not get adequate sleep increase their chances of diabetes, cardiovascular disease, obesity, and depression. In addition, sleep-deprived firefighters may not perform well and will not be as alert as well-rested firefighters.

Tired firefighters can be a safety risk. Firefighters and EMTs should consider taking naps before shifts or going to bed earlier to get as much sleep as possible before the nightly calls come in.

Challenge Rules

1. Calculate your average amount of sleep per day/night. Compare your average to the recommended amount. Record your hours on the [Count Your Zzz's chart](#).
2. Strive for at least seven hours of sleep per day. Plan out your day accordingly, which may include cutting out your favorite TV show in order to get to bed earlier, or ending evening plans early.
3. You have successfully completed this challenge when you have reached 20 days with at least seven hours of sleep during the month of March.

To motivate your department members, try sending out weekly emails explaining the importance of rest and tips on improving sleep. Seek out ways to improve sleep as a department, such as asking night crews to go to bed by a certain time. If you see a fellow firefighter dragging from lack of sleep, point them to the bunkroom!

Focus on Fitness

Challenge each of your department members to focus on their personal fitness. Fitness is defined as the result of cardiovascular, muscular strength, muscular endurance, and flexibility conditioning, as well as ideal body weight maintenance. Fitness helps keep lungs and hearts healthy and can relieve stress.

Start the challenge by distributing the [Focus on Fitness Goal Sheet](#) to challenge participants.

Challenge Rules

1. Using the Focus on Fitness Goal Sheet, determine your fitness goal for the month. How many times can you realistically work out per week? Set a goal that is challenging but attainable.
2. Track your workouts on your personal goal sheet.
3. Once you have developed your workout schedule, keep it going throughout the year!

To motivate your department members, try sending out weekly emails with exercise tips, easy workout ideas, and motivational messages and quotes. Organize a weekly group fitness activity, such as a jog or trip to the gym. Set up a bulletin board with exercise examples in the station. Sign up for a charity walk near you.

Fruits and Veggies - More Matters™ Month

In September, challenge department members to eat their own proper serving size of fruits and vegetables. Those who consume the recommended amount of fruits and vegetables each day are likely to have reduced risk of diseases such as stroke, certain cancers, and cardiovascular

disease compared to those who eat a diet with inadequate amounts. This reduced risk is due to fruits and vegetables containing essential vitamins, minerals, and fiber that protect you from chronic diseases.

Fruits and vegetables also help maintain your weight. Adding more fruits and vegetables to your diet can help you cut calories and lose weight, because many fruits and vegetables are filling and naturally low in fat and calories. You can eat the same amount of food with fewer calories because the water and fiber in fruits and vegetables add volume to your dishes. As a volunteer first responder, you are always on-the-go. Your busy life can benefit from nutritious foods that are easy to eat while you are heading from work to the station or back home. Before you leave the house, grab an apple, carrots, or celery sticks to snack on instead of running to the vending machine and grabbing a bag of chips for your afternoon snack.

Challenge Rules

1. Visit the [Fruits and Veggies Matter More web site](#) and calculate the servings of fruits and vegetables recommended for your age, gender, and physical activity level.
2. Record the number of servings of fruits and vegetables you consume daily on the [Fruit and Veggie Tracking Sheet](#).
3. The goal is to eat the amount of servings of fruit and vegetables recommended for you. Are you eating the amount of servings you are supposed to? If not, why? Think of ways you can increase your fruit and vegetable consumption.
4. You have completed the challenge if you reach your daily goal at least 20 days out of the month. Remember to continue to focus on eating plenty of servings of fruits and vegetables throughout the year, not just for one month!

To encourage your department to incorporate the correct amount of fruits and vegetables in their diet, cook meals while on duty and encourage them to add more fruits and vegetables to their diet. Continually check in with your colleagues to see to how they are advancing and help inspire them to continue their healthy lifestyle.

Keep it Strong

Challenge each of your department members to focus on gaining strength. Besides two-and-a-half hours of aerobic activity each week, you should do things to strengthen your muscles at least two days a week. These activities should work all the major muscle groups of your body (legs, hips, back, chest, abdomen, shoulders, and arms).

To gain health benefits, muscle-strengthening activities need to be done to the point where it is hard for you to do another repetition without help. A repetition is one complete movement of an activity, like lifting a weight or doing a sit-up. Try to do eight-12 repetitions per activity that count as one set. Try to do at least one set of muscle-strengthening activities, but to gain even more benefits, do two or three sets. You can do activities that strengthen your muscles on the same or different days that you do aerobic activity, whatever works best for you.

Challenge Rules

1. Determine when you can work strength training into your fitness schedule. Aim to strength train two days a week.
2. Track your workouts on your personal [Keep It Strong goal sheet](#).
3. Remember to keep working on strength training throughout the year!

To motivate your department members, try sending out weekly emails with exercise tips, easy workout ideas, and motivational messages and quotes. Seek out ways to strength train without ever leaving the station (ex. lifting gear). Put up a bulletin board with exercise examples in the station.

Keep the Beat

During February, challenge each of your department members to improve their cardiovascular fitness as part of [American Heart Month](#). For the greatest health benefits, cardiovascular activity should be performed by adults for at least 30 minutes a day, five times a week within your target heart rate. Heart rate should be taken immediately after exercise.

Your target heart rate should be 50 to 70 percent of your maximum heart rate. This maximum rate is based on your age. To find an estimate of your maximum age-related heart rate, subtract your age from 220. For example, for a 50-year-old person, the estimated maximum age-related heart rate would be calculated as $220 - 50 \text{ years} = 170$ beats per minute (bpm). The 50 percent and 70 percent levels would be:

- 50 percent: $170 \times 0.50 = 85$ bpm
- 70 percent: $170 \times 0.70 = 119$ bpm

Thus, the moderate-intensity physical activity for a 50-year-old person requires that the heart rate remains between 85 and 119 bpm during physical activity.

Challenge Rules

1. Calculate your target heart rate zone. Use the [Target Heart Rate Zone Calculating Worksheet](#).
2. Plan out times throughout the week to do at least 30 minutes of continuous cardiovascular activity.
3. The goal of this challenge is to reach your target heart rate while doing aerobic exercise at least three times per week.

To motivate your department members, try sending out weekly emails with different types of cardiovascular exercises, motivational messages and quotes, and exercise tips. Seek out ways to train together as a department, such as group runs, basketball or other group sports, or bike rides. Put up a bulletin board with exercise examples in the station.

Make a Plan for a Heart-Healthy Budget

Challenge each of your department members to make a plan to lose weight or to maintain their heart-healthy weight. If you are overweight or obese, carrying this extra weight puts you at risk for developing many diseases, especially heart disease, stroke, diabetes, and cancer. Losing this weight helps to prevent and control these diseases. The key to achieving and maintaining a healthy weight is not about short-term dietary changes. It is about a lifestyle that includes healthy eating, regular physical activity, and balancing the number of calories you consume with the number of calories your body uses. Staying in control of your weight contributes to good health now and as you age.

Challenge Rules

1. Complete "[Your Weight and Health Profile.](#)"
2. Set a goal for the end of August, then for each month after that.
3. You have successfully completed the challenge for the month when you have taken steps to get in control of your weight by making a plan to lose weight or maintain your heart-healthy weight. But do not stop here – keep it going all year long!

To motivate your department members, send out weekly emails with tips on losing weight, articles about the benefits of staying in shape, and inspirational quotes from athletes or other notable sources. Check in with each participant to see how they are progressing and encourage them to keep going. Organize healthy lunches and group fitness activities with your department.

Nuts for Nutrition

Since most of our nourishment comes from food, it is important to understand basic components of nutrition and to realize how easy it is to eat healthy and satisfying meals. To start, provide your department members with the [Food Log tracking sheet](#), information on [reading a nutrition label](#), [healthy recipes ideas](#), and [healthy food substitutions](#).

Challenge Rules

1. Determine where your weak spots are. Do you eat more at parties? Do you have a sweet tooth? Think ahead about tempting situations and have a plan for a healthy food substitution.
2. Each day, record the food and drinks you consume on the [Nuts for Nutrition Food Log](#) and think about your successes and/or what you could work on. Strive to have less areas of improvement each week.
3. The goal of the challenge is to have a healthy-eating day (little or no room for improvement) at least five out of seven days each week. Remember, you can enjoy sweets and other treats in moderation – just make sure and focus on healthier choices the rest of the week.

To motivate your department members, try sending out weekly emails with new recipes, motivational messages and quotes, and food substitution ideas. Plan a heart-healthy holiday potluck and ask everyone to bring their recipe to share. Put up a bulletin board with reminders and tips in the station

Summer Fitness

In July or August, challenge each of your department members to maintain a fitness routine even in the lazy days of summer. Vacations, cookouts, and intense heat outside can make it hard to keep track of fitness goals. You and your department members can stay in great shape while still enjoying all that the season has to offer.

It is easy to incorporate exercise into your summer plans. At your next department picnic, plan a game of softball or touch football. Encourage department members to jump in and swim laps the next time they are lounging by the pool. Hold a car wash fundraiser – scrubbing cars can work off some calories. Take advantage of warm weather and walk or bike to the station, work, and around the neighborhood.

When temperatures peak, complete your outdoor exercise in the morning and plan indoor fitness for the afternoon. When traveling, taking long walks or hiking can help get your heart pumping while allowing you to take in the sights.

Challenge Rules

1. Determine your fitness goals for the summer. Think about which days you'll be out of town or have plans and how you can still incorporate physical activity on those days.
2. Track your workouts using a journal or notebook.
3. You have successfully completed the challenge if you have logged at least four hours of physical activity each week this month.

To motivate your department members, send out weekly emails with exercise tips, easy workout ideas, and motivational messages and quotes. When you know someone is going on vacation, remind them to take their goal sheet with them. Put up a bulletin board with exercise examples in the station. Plan a department activity like a car wash or softball game.

Team Up

This May, challenge each of your department members to participate in a sport together in honor of [National Physical Fitness and Sports Month](#). Team sports not only provide exercise – they also build teamwork skills, something that is very important for first responders. Team sports are also a fun way to help relieve stress.

Some friendly competition may provide the motivation that many people need to exercise. Adults 18 and older need 30 minutes of physical activity on five or more days a week to be healthy. Moderate daily physical activity can substantially reduce the risk of developing or dying from cardiovascular disease, type 2 diabetes, and certain cancers, such as colon cancer. Daily physical activity also helps to lower blood pressure and cholesterol, helps prevent or retard osteoporosis, and helps reduce obesity, symptoms of anxiety and depression, and symptoms of arthritis.

Challenge Rules

1. Choose a team sport that will involve as many members of your department as possible. Examples include basketball, softball, touch football, volleyball, kickball, and soccer.
2. Record each activity completed and the number of department members that participated.
3. Strive for as many different activities throughout the month as possible. Try to get at least 50 percent of the department involved at least four times throughout the month.

To motivate your department members, try sending out weekly emails with motivational messages, quotes, and exercise tips. Try to get as many members of your department involved as possible. Set up times well in advance for departmental team sport events. Install a basketball hoop or provide a map to a softball field near your firehouse. Increase the competition by challenging neighboring departments to friendly sporting events such as softball or football. Put up a bulletin board with tips for exercising in the station.

Sources: [Academy of Nutrition and Dieticians](#), [American Cancer Society](#), [American Psychological Association](#), [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#), [HealthySD.gov](#), [President's Council on Sports, Fitness & Nutrition](#), and [Weight Control Information Network](#)