

April Well Aware eNews

Welcome to the April 2024 issue of *Well Aware eNews!* Read on to learn about—

- this month's wellness champion, an elementary guidance counselor who has gone above and beyond to plan wellness programs that encourage her coworkers to live healthy lives;
- a webinar on the hormones that can improve mood and how to increase their levels in your body naturally;
- an update on the *Reach the Beach* physical activity challenge;
- National Cancer Control Month;
- the American Cancer Society's Move More Month;
- National Get Fit Don't Sit Day;
- the Well Aware/Employee Assistance Program Connection's Stress Awareness Month; and
- more!



Don't Miss It

**This month's free webinar—
How to Hack Happiness**

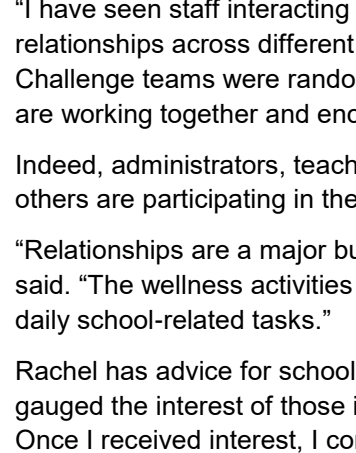
Do you want more happiness in your life? Meet the fabulous four: dopamine, oxytocin, serotonin, and endorphins. We will dive deep into health and science to help you understand how these four hormones can improve your mood and how you can help your body increase its levels naturally.

**Wednesday, April 17, 2024
4:30–5:30 p.m.**

Please **email Well Aware** to register for the webinar. After registering, you will receive a link to the webinar in your Outlook email as well as an Outlook calendar reminder.

Spread the word with our **printable flyer**. Visit the **Wellness Webinar Library**.

Wellness Champion Establishes Health and Wellness Activities at School to Ensure Staff "Show Up as [Their] Best Selves"



Mrs. Rachel H. Halo, school counselor, JoAnn Leleck Elementary School at Broad Acres

Rachel Halo, guidance counselor for Joann Leleck Elementary School at Broad Acres, has gone above and beyond to plan wellness programs to encourage her coworkers to live healthy lives. She fully understands the importance of health and wellness for school staff.

"In order to provide for others and show up as our best selves, it is essential for school staff to fill up our own buckets," Rachel said. "By participating in a wellness activity or class after school, it allows staff to decompress, have fun, and build relationships with one another to continue creating and maintaining a positive school climate."

Rachel has worked hard to organize staff wellness events at the school.

"In the past, we had a trainer come and lead an athletic bootcamp for staff after school," Rachel said. "This year, we hosted a monthly wellness class/activity for staff, including Dance Fitness Party classes and yoga classes."

Rachel and her coworkers also established a Walking Step Challenge, in which staff compete with one another to attain the highest number of steps. Five teams have been created, with six employees on each team. They use Google Sheets to record their steps. Local restaurants, stores, and community members have generously donated prizes, which serve as weekly incentives.

Rachel has noticed many positive outcomes from the school's wellness programs.

"I have seen staff interacting with those they usually do not work directly with and building relationships across different staff roles in the building," Rachel said. "Walking Step Challenge teams were randomly selected so employees who may not know each other well are working together and encouraging one another to reach their goals."

Indeed, administrators, teachers, paraeducators, building service workers, secretaries, and others are participating in the wellness activities.

"Relationships are a major building block to creating a positive work environment," Rachel said. "The wellness activities have helped people get to know one another outside of their daily school-related tasks."

Rachel has advice for schools and offices looking to start a staff wellness program. "I gauged the interest of those in the building if they would be interested in wellness activities. Once I received interest, I continued recruiting other staff members to come and join. Reminders for the wellness activities were given through email and on the announcements."

Have You Taken the Wellness Initiatives for 2025?

The Wellness Initiatives program provides employees covered by an MCPS-provided medical insurance plan with incentives to reduce their health insurance costs. Be sure to take advantage of the rate reductions by following these steps:

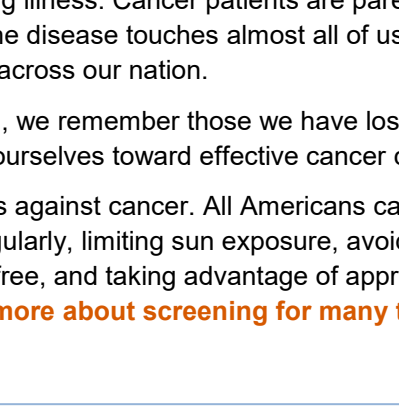
1. Complete a biometric health screening by October 4, 2024—See your doctor for an annual physical, attend one of Well Aware's **on-site biometric health screenings** or, if you are a Cigna member, have your physical at a Quest Patient Services Center.
2. Complete a health risk assessment on your medical plan's website by October 4, 2024.

Kaiser Permanente members: You will need to sign a HIPAA waiver. A link to the waiver is available on the **Wellness Initiatives for Employees web page**. Be sure to log in to confirm your participation in the Wellness Initiatives program. Without your consent, your information will not be reported.

Reach the Beach Physical Activity Challenge Update

We are four weeks into the *Reach the Beach* physical activity challenge, and our MCPS coworkers are working hard! We have already awarded prizes to 20 individuals who also received a grant for their school/office/depot for logging their activity. We are getting closer to the beach with each step!

There is still time to *Reach the Beach*. Register for a **Well Aware Fitness Log** account and start logging your activity. **See all of the *Reach the Beach* challenge details.**



April Is National Cancer Control Month

This year, an estimated 500,000 Americans will lose their lives to cancer, and three times that many will be diagnosed with this devastating illness. Cancer patients are parents and grandparents, children and cherished friends; the disease touches almost all of us and casts a shadow over families and communities across our nation.

During National Cancer Control Month this April, we remember those we have lost, support Americans fighting this disease, and recommit ourselves toward effective cancer control.

Prevention and screening are our best defenses against cancer. All Americans can reduce their risk by eating a healthy diet, exercising regularly, limiting sun exposure, avoiding excessive alcohol consumption, living tobacco-free, and taking advantage of appropriate, regularly scheduled cancer screenings. **Learn more about screening for many types of cancers.**

American Heart Association: April Is Move More Month

Every April, the American Heart Association celebrates physical activity and encourages all Americans to commit to being more active on a regular basis. The American Heart Association encourages you to Move More Together with these **Five-Minute Movement Breaks!**

Are you fitting in at least 150 minutes (2.5 hours) of heart-pumping physical activity per week? If not, you're not alone. Only about one in five adults and teens get enough exercise to maintain good health. Being more active can help all people think, feel and sleep better and perform daily tasks more easily. And if you're sedentary, sitting less is a great place to start.

These recommendations are based on the Physical Activity Guidelines for Americans, 2nd edition, published by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Office of Disease Prevention and Health Promotion. They recommend how much physical activity we need to be healthy. The guidelines are based on current scientific evidence supporting the connections between physical activity, overall health and well-being, disease prevention and quality of life.

Adults should be getting at least 150 minutes per week of moderate-intensity aerobic activity or 75 minutes per week of vigorous aerobic activity, or a combination of both, preferably spread throughout the week.

Children 3–5 years old should be physically active and have plenty of opportunities to move throughout the day. Kids 6–17 years old should get at least 60 minutes per day of moderate-to-vigorous-intensity physical activity, mostly aerobic.

If you are getting started, remember that any amount of movement is better than none. Start by taking a two-minute walk and add to it!

Did You Miss This Year's National Walking Day?

If you missed this year's National Walking Day on April 3, no worries! Spring provides us with many more days to begin the practice of walking.

Did you know—

- Less than 48 percent of adults in the U.S. get enough aerobic exercise to improve their health. Aerobic exercise includes walking. Get outside and get that heart rate up!
- All it takes is 15 minutes of walking to curb a craving for chocolate or other sweet-related foods. Next time you are looking for something sweet, take a walk around the block.
- A study found that those who walked 20 minutes per day for five days a week reported taking nearly 50 percent fewer sick days than those who exercised once per week or less.

Since 2007, the American Heart Association has sponsored National Walking Day to promote healthy living. It is held the first Wednesday in April each year. **Find out why walking is the most popular form of exercise.**

Did your school/office/depot celebrate the event? **Email your stories and photos to Well Aware.**

American Diabetes Association National Get Fit Don't Sit Day

Held the first Wednesday of May each year, National Get Fit Don't Sit Day is an opportunity for the American Diabetes Association to increase awareness of the dangers of excessive sitting and the importance of getting up and moving throughout the day—especially at work.

Research shows that sitting for long periods of time increases the risk of health complications. The American Diabetes Association recommends breaking up sitting time with three or more minutes of light physical activity—such as walking, leg extensions, or overhead arm stretches—every 30 minutes.

Here are some resources with ideas to get you moving:

- **More information on why sitting is bad for our health.**
- **Desk exercises**

Stress Less This Spring

Fresh air and exercise can help you to manage stress. In addition, being in the outdoors and in nature can improve mental wellbeing. Spring is a wonderful time to get outside and enjoy nature. **Check out this article to learn more information on how nature helps mental health.**

In addition to spending more time in nature, Well Aware is continuing our online live and recorded classes for your convenience. From yoga and seated yoga, to mindfulness and tai chi, there is something for everyone. Give them all a try to see what you like best.

Email Well Aware to get the full schedule of classes. Register for the daily wellness email to stay up to date on class links, and updates. **Opt-in to this email distribution list.**

Join Well Aware for Physical Activity Classes

Physical activity or exercise can improve your health and reduce the risk of developing several diseases like type 2 diabetes, cancer and cardiovascular disease. Physical activity and exercise can have immediate and long-term health benefits. Most importantly, regular activity can improve your heart, your mind, and your overall wellness. Consider trying one of the classes below to see what kind of physical activity is best for you!

This spring, Well Aware is continuing our online virtual live and recorded classes for your convenience. From Zumba and HIITCamp, to yoga and core workouts, there is something for everyone. Give them all a try to see what you like best.

Email Well Aware to get the full schedule of classes. Register for the daily wellness email update to stay up to date on class links, and updates. **Opt-in to this email distribution list.**

Share Your Wellness Stories and Encourage Your Coworkers!

Well Aware is proud of MCPS employees for all of the hard work they are doing to lead healthy lives. Share your stories and your spirit on X (formerly Twitter). Perhaps you need some extra motivation to begin a staff wellness program at your school, depot, or office, or to turn life-long unhealthy habits into healthy ones. Follow @mcpswellaware for incredible stories, wellness ideas, encouragement from your MCPS coworkers, tips on living a healthy life, or for updates on MCPS staff wellness programs.

Montgomery County Offers MCPS Employees Free Access to Its Recreation Facilities and Pools

As a permanent MCPS employee, you have free access to all Montgomery County (MC) recreation facilities, including swimming pools and gymnasiums. You also are eligible for a 20 percent discount on an annual pool pass for your family members.

Interested? **Learn more** by visiting the **MC Recreation website** for general information. You may **apply online** for the individual Total Rec Pass. The **Employee Family Pool Pass application** also is available online. Both passes are valid for one year; you need to reapply each year to continue your access to the facilities.

Well Aware Toolbox

Self-care means taking the time to do things that help you live well and improve both your physical health and mental health. When it comes to your mental health, self-care can help you manage stress, lower your risk of illness, and increase your energy. Studies show that self-care is essential to well-being, especially during times of uncertainty and transition.

The Well Aware Wellness Toolbox is a one-stop web page to find all of the free resources for you to manage your health and wellness. These tools include physical and mental health resources, lists of free exercise and mindfulness classes, links to resources for improving sleep, nutrition, and more. MCPS staff are encouraged to take the time for self-care. **Check out the Well Aware Toolbox to see what self-care resources will work best for you!**

Join Us for Another Virtual Staff Wellness Day

Save the Date! During the Professional Day on Wednesday, April 10, 2024, Well Aware, Healthier Generation, Kaiser Permanente, and Cigna are coming together to present a virtual wellness day. Take a few minutes out of your professional day to give one of our wellness programs a try. This is a great opportunity to sample some of the classes that Well Aware hosts throughout the year, as well as to prioritize your health and wellness. **See the class schedule, description, and related links.**

Omada for Cigna and Kaiser Permanente Members

Omada is a personalized program that helps members lose weight and create healthier habits by offering one-on-one personal coaching and the tools needed to make long-lasting health changes.

Qualifying participants receive the following:

- One-on-one support from a personal health coach
- Easy monitoring with a smart scale, which is yours to keep
- Tools for managing stress and creating a healthy mindset
- Actionable tips in weekly lessons
- Encouragement from an online community

For more information about the Omada program and to apply, visit the **Omada website**.

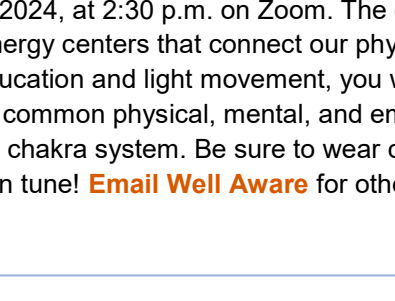
Have You Accessed HFP Live?

MCPS Well Aware and Cigna have partnered to provide all MCPS staff with access to *HFP Live*, a wellness livestream and video library built specifically for employees who are hard at work.

HFP Live broadcasts webinars, workshops, demos, and fitness classes in real time and with recordings for employees to view. Each week, we will send a schedule highlighting some of the upcoming events that you can check out. You can access the livestream portal and also view the schedule of upcoming events from any computer, laptop, tablet, or cell phone by using a password-protected link. Can't make a live session? No worries. Each livestreamed event is recorded and posted in a video library for you to access for at least 30 days. **Learn more. Log in to participate** using password: mcpssmd.

Well Aware and the Employee Assistance Program

Monthly Connection: Stress Awareness Month



Did you know that mental and physical health are linked? Recent research has shown that an improvement or decline in one can lead to an improvement or decline in the other. The great news is that the body and brain are both very responsive to positive change!

For this reason, the MCPS EAP (Employee Assistance Program) and Well Aware (the MCPS Employee Wellness Program), are excited to work together to bring you monthly topics focusing on mental and physical health. These resources will help you align your wellness journey to ensure that you are focusing on both physical and mental health. Look for these resources each month in the Well Aware eNews, The Bulletin, the Well Aware Toolbox, and on the EAP web pages.

EAP Resources

April is National Stress Awareness Month! We all experience stress from time to time, and not all stress is harmful to our well-being. In fact, the body's stress response—fight, flight, or freeze—activates in order to protect you from danger. When you're faced with danger, this stress response can keep you safe. However, the body reacts the same way to danger as it does to everyday stressful events. When the stressful situation or event is short-term, the body's stress response is also short-term; you recover relatively quickly and return to baseline. However, when the stressful situation is ongoing and you're unable to take enough breaks or time to relax, stress can easily become overwhelming. It's important to build up your toolbox with supportive strategies that help you cope with stress effectively.

The EAP is here to help! Join the EAP for a workshop on *Recognizing and Responding to Stress* on Tuesday, April 23, 2024, from 5:00–6:00 p.m. This workshop will take place over Zoom and is open to all MCPS employees. Register on **Professional Development Online (PDO)**, course number 92450.

You also can learn more about coping with stress from the **Centers for Disease Control and Prevention**, and learn about the differences between stress and anxiety from the **National Institute of Mental Health**.

Well Aware Resources

Stress symptoms may be affecting your health, even though you might not know it. You may blame sickness for that annoying headache, your sleeping troubles, feeling unwell, or your lack of focus at work. But stress may really be the cause.

- **Learn how stress manifests physically.**
- **Discover some surprising ways stress can affect your body.**
- **Learn about Well Aware's virtual Mindfulness Series.**

Calling all yogis! *What is a chakra?* Tanya Proffitt, RYT-500 (a registered yoga teacher who has completed a 500-hour yoga teacher training), will lead a workshop to examine the human chakra system on Sunday, April 14, 2024, at 2:30 p.m. on Zoom. The chakra system is thought to contain seven major energy centers that connect our physical bodies to our internal life force (prana). Through education and light movement, you will begin to understand the function of each chakra and common physical, mental, and emotional ailments that can result from an unbalanced chakra system. Be sure to wear comfortable clothing, and join us as we get aligned and in tune! **Email Well Aware** for other details, including log-in information.

Weighed Down by Stress? Wellbeats Is Here to Support You

Access thousands of top-notch fitness, nutrition, and mindfulness classes—all at no cost! Log in to your Wellbeats account on your device and explore a wide range of guided classes to help manage stress. Don't have an account yet? Check out the **flyer** for login information. In the meantime, enjoy this **welcome video**.

From calming yoga sessions to energizing workouts to healthy recipes, we've got something that suits your needs.

If you prefer to follow a step-by-step plan, consider joining the two-week Stress Less Program. This program is designed to ease feeling overwhelmed by providing techniques, exercises, and nutritional guidance to reduce stress levels and improve your daily life. In your Wellbeats Wellness account, go to **Programs** to join the Stress Less program today. Check out the attached **flyer** and **program calendar**.

Access to Wellbeats is free for MCPS staff! Wellbeats offers a 24/7 virtual fitness, nutrition, and mindfulness classes. These classes can be streamed on your personal devices at home, school, or on the go. You can schedule classes in advance, and invite your coworkers to join you. You also can download classes to play when you are offline.

The employee wellness newsletter is brought to you by the Employee and Retiree Service Center (ERSC). Learn more about employee wellness by visiting our **website**. **View this email newsletter as a PDF document.** Questions or comments about your employee wellness program? Contact ERSC at 301-517-8100 or **email Well Aware**.