

## November Well Aware eNews

Welcome to the November 2023 issue of *Well Aware eNews!* Read on to learn about—

- this month's wellness champion, a visual arts teacher who found her enthusiasm for running races during Well Aware's virtual 5k training program in the spring and continues to rave every chance she gets;
- a webinar on how to build a strong and resilient body to lessen your risk of health issues;
- American Diabetes Month;
- Eat Smart Month;
- this year's *Great American Smokeout*;
- Wellbeats' *Rest and Restore* program;
- National Gratitude Month; and
- more!



### Don't Miss It

**This month's free webinar—**  
**Kick Start Your Immunity**

Immune system support is not simply found in a bottle. To build a strong and resilient body, it takes a comprehensive approach. Learn how to stack wellness actions to lessen your risk of health issues during virus season as well as year-round.

**Wednesday, November 16, 2023**  
4:30 p.m.–5:30 p.m.

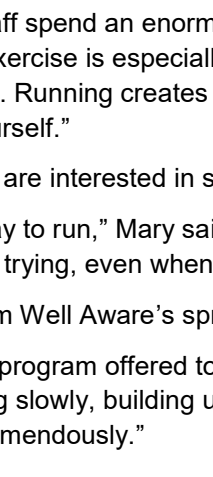
Please **email Well Aware** to register for the webinar. After registering, you will receive a link to the webinar in your Outlook email as well as an Outlook calendar reminder.

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

*Presented by: Kaiser Permanente*

## Wellness Champions: Long-time Runner Completes Well Aware's Virtual 5k Training Program

**Mary O'Neil-Wood, visual arts teacher, Montgomery Virtual Academy**



Mary O'Neil-Wood, visual arts teacher at Montgomery Virtual Academy, redoubled her enthusiasm for running races during Well Aware's virtual 5k training program this past spring. She continues to race every chance she gets.

"I have always loved running, mostly sprinting, and have always tried to run every day, even as a kid," Mary said. "I ran track for a short time as a teenager but didn't start entering races until I was an adult. I had to learn pacing."

Running has positively impacted Mary's health and wellness. She is fully aware of the obvious health benefits of running for our hearts, blood pressure, bones, muscles, and minds.

"Running is a stress reliever and a great antidepressant," Mary said. "I have more endurance, and I always feel so much better after running. I've gotten into the habit of running a 5k every other day."

Mary also acknowledges the importance of physical activity for school staff.

"Teachers and other school staff spend an enormous amount of time helping and caring for others," Mary said. "I believe exercise is especially important for those who might feel tension or stress from teaching. Running creates an opportunity to be alone (or with others) and do something good for yourself."

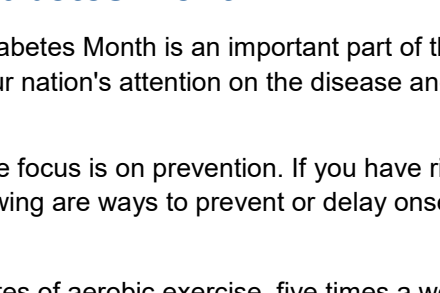
Mary has advice for those who are interested in starting a running program.

"Find the days and a time of day to run," Mary said. "Start slow and build up to running longer at your own pace. Keep trying, even when you don't feel like it, and take your time." She benefited significantly from Well Aware's spring 5k training program.

"I love the Well Aware running program offered to MCPS staff in the spring," Mary said. "You begin walking and running slowly, building up endurance and strength. The coaching techniques have helped me tremendously."

## Well Aware and the Employee Assistance Program

### Monthly Connection: November is National Gratitude 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 Employee Assistance Program (EAP) and Well Aware are working together to bring you monthly topics focusing on mental and physical health. Our joint resources will help you align your wellness journey to ensure 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 page**.

#### National Gratitude Month

November is National Gratitude Month! As many begin preparing for the start of the holiday season, a helpful way to focus on self-care is to practice gratitude. Research has shown that a six-week gratitude practice effectively improves mental well-being for up to six months. Read this **article from the Journal of Happiness**.

Might the benefits of gratitude go beyond that? Could gratitude be good for your physical health, too? Studies have associated gratitude with a whole slew of benefits—from fewer aches and pains to improved sleep to better cardiovascular health. Read the *Greater Good Magazine* article, "**Is Gratitude Good for Your Health?**"

Take a look at these other resources on gratitude:

- **Thirteen exercises** to practice gratitude.
- When a favorite holiday comes and goes, it's natural to experience a range of thoughts and emotions. See this **Holiday Gratitude Practice** from Headspace. Don't have a Headspace account? Headspace offers free access to K-12 educators and supporting staff professionals. **Visit the website** to learn more.

Check out these upcoming EAP webinars available to MCPS staff:

- November 15, 2023—*Effective Communication Strategies* from the Alzheimer's Association. **RSVP**.
- November 16, 2023—*Financial Wellness* with the Foundation for Financial Education on Holiday Spending. **RSVP**.
- November 28, 2023—*Exploring Legacy and Rituals for the Bereaved at the Holidays* with CaringMatters. **RSVP**.

## November is American Diabetes Month

Observed every November, American Diabetes Month is an important part of the American Diabetes Association's efforts to focus our nation's attention on the disease and the tens of millions of people affected by it.

Because there is no cure for diabetes, the focus is on prevention. If you have risk factors or **symptoms**, or are pre-diabetic, the following are ways to prevent or delay onset of diabetes:

- **Get physically active.** Just 30 minutes of aerobic exercise, five times a week, reduces your risk of diabetes. If you haven't been active, start with 5–10 minutes a day and gradually work your way up to 30 minutes.
- **Eat healthy.** It may seem hard to eat healthy if you are on a budget or always crunched for time. You are more likely to adopt healthy eating habits if you start with small changes. Look for ways to make your meals healthy by choosing—
  - non-starchy vegetables—carrots, broccoli, green beans, kale, and cauliflower;
  - lean meats—skinless chicken and turkey and lean cuts of pork and beef;
  - low-fat dairy products—skim milk and fat-free yogurts;
  - whole grains—brown rice, barley, farro, quinoa; and
  - healthy fats (in small amounts)—olive, canola, sunflower, and peanut oil.

- **If you smoke or use tobacco—quit.**

## Fall Physical Activity Challenge Reprise: MCPS on the Move

### MCPS on the Move



Although the *MCPS on the Move* physical activity challenge is nearing completion, there is still time to join! The challenge is not only getting MCPS employees moving, but it is also establishing long-term healthy habits. There is a lot of school and team competition for the grand prize grants. **Learn more**.

## November Is Eat Smart Month

Take simple steps to eat healthier by celebrating Eat Smart Month in November. Throughout the month, the American Heart Association is urging Americans to take the first step to commit to healthier eating. The food we eat is a very important part of living a healthy lifestyle.

- **7 Hacks for Healthy Eating at Home**
- **Bring Back Family Mealtime**
- **Healthy Grocery Shopping**

## The Great American Smokeout Is Coming!

Quitting smoking is not easy. It takes time and a plan. You don't have to stop smoking in one day; you just start with one day. Let this year's **Great American Smokeout** on **November 16** be the day you start your journey toward a smoke-free life. You will be joining thousands of smokers across the country in taking an important step toward a healthier life and reducing your cancer risk. Plus, the American Cancer Society has the **resources and support** you need to quit.

Quitting smoking has immediate and long-term benefits at any age. Quitting is hard, but you can increase your chances of success with help. Getting help through counseling or medications can double or triple your chance of quitting successfully.

Visit Well Aware's *Quit for Good* web page for some **Great American Smokeout resources**.

## Information on Flu Shots

Getting a flu shot has always been the smart thing to do. It is the best way to protect against the flu and stop its spread. But in the midst of the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic and its Omicron variants, a flu shot is essential.

The flu vaccine is active each year from October through April. An estimated 5–20 percent of Americans get the flu each year with symptoms lasting up to two weeks. Having the flu and coronavirus at the same time likely leads to further complications and more severe outcomes.

The flu vaccine takes about two weeks to be effective, so it is important to get the vaccine as early as possible. Still, better late than never. Once the flu season is under way, it is not too late to get vaccinated.

Both Cigna and Kaiser Permanente have laid out detailed plans for getting this year's flu shot.

- **Cigna**
- **Kaiser Permanente**

Here are some other resources to show you how to protect yourself from colds and flu:

- **Healthy Habits to Help Prevent Flu** from the CDC
- **Cold remedies: What works, what doesn't, what can't hurt** from the Mayo Clinic
- **Protect Yourself from the Seasonal Flu** from the Office of Disease Prevention and Health Promotion.

## Wellness Initiatives

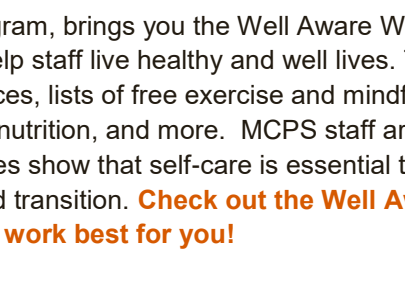
### You Can Take the Wellness Initiative for 2025 as Early as ... Now!

Did you miss your opportunity to save money on your 2024 health insurance premiums? Each year, you have an opportunity to pay up to 2 percent less on your MCPS-provided health insurance by participating in the Wellness Initiatives program. By completing a biometric health screening and filling out your medical plan's online health risk assessment, MCPS will pay 2 percent more of your health insurance premiums. For more information, please visit the **Wellness Initiatives for Employees website**.

Avoid the rush next fall. Begin taking the wellness initiative for 2025 now!

## It's Time to Quit for Good

Are you interested in quitting? MCPS and Kaiser Permanente are again teaming up to bring you the *Quit for Good* tobacco cessation program.



The free program is available to employees and their spouses, regardless of whether or not you participate in MCPS employee benefits or if you participate with Kaiser.

Now shorter in length, and held via webinar, it is easier than ever to take the first step to becoming tobacco free. Learn and discuss the skills necessary to quit and successfully live tobacco-free.

Start your new year off right! The next class starts in January 2024. **Learn more**.

## Stress Less this Fall

With the holidays approaching, we need to find time for stress management. Stress can negatively affect your emotional wellness, as well as your physical health. It makes it harder to think clearly, function effectively, and enjoy life.

Effective stress management, on the other hand, helps you break the hold that stress has on your life, so you can be happier, healthier, and more productive. The ultimate goal is a balanced life, with time for work, relationships, relaxation, and fun—and the flexibility to hold up under pressure and meet challenges head on. But stress management is not one-size-fits-all. That's why it's important to experiment and find out what works best for you.

This fall, Well Aware is continuing our virtual, live, and recorded classes, and adding some onsite classes for your convenience. From Zumba and HIITCamp, to yoga and core workout classes, 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 for class links and updates. **Opt in to this email distribution list**.

## Join Us for Online Physical Activity Classes

Regular movement can reduce the risk of developing serious illness, such as type 2 diabetes, cancer, and cardiovascular disease. Physical activity and exercise can have immediate and long-term health benefits. It can improve your overall wellness, including your physical and mental health. It also helps you better manage stress.

This fall, Well Aware is offering some onsite classes and is continuing its virtual, live, and recorded classes for your convenience. From Zumba and HIITCamp, to yoga and core workout classes, 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 for class links and updates. **Opt in to this email distribution list**.

## Omada to Present Its Understanding Pre-diabetes and Diabetes Webinar

Join Omada this month for *Understanding Pre-diabetes and Diabetes*, a webinar available to all MCPS employees. The event will be held Wednesday, November 15, 2023, at 4:30 p.m. To register, **email Well Aware**. You do not need to be a Cigna member to participate in the webinar.

Omada is a personalized program that helps members lose weight and create healthier habits through one-on-one personal coaching and the tools needed to make long-lasting health changes. Cigna and Omada have partnered to offer Cigna members access to the program. 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, check out this **two-minute video**.

## Wellbeats Is for All!

MCPS staff has free access to Wellbeats! Wellbeats offers 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, and you can also download classes to play when you are offline. Check out the attached flyer for login information. In the meantime, enjoy this **welcome video**, and this video showing you that **Wellbeing is for All!**

Join the Wellbeats *Rest and Restore* program for the opportunity to win great prizes! Do you struggle to fall asleep or stay asleep? Holiday stress, travel, and changes in routine can make it harder to relax and fall asleep. Join the two-week *Rest and Restore* for soothing meditations to calm your mind and gentle yoga to release tension and prepare for sleep. Visit Wellbeats to register! Complete the classes by December 15<sup>th</sup> for a chance to win!

## Have You Accessed HFP Live?

Well Aware is pleased to announce that MCPS and Cigna have partnered to provide access to *HFP Live*, a wellness livestream and video library built specifically for employees who are hard at work. *HFP Live* will broadcast webinars, workshops, demos, and fitness classes in real time and via 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#1.

## Virtual Cooking Demonstration: Winter Warmers

Save the date and join us for a *Winter Warmers* virtual cooking demonstration!

**Thursday, November 30, 2023**  
5:00 p.m.

**Email Well Aware** to learn more and register.

## Share Your Wellness Stories and Encourage Your Coworkers!

Well Aware is proud of MCPS employee 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 @mcpsswellaware for incredible stories, wellness ideas, encouragement from your MCPS coworkers, tips on living a healthy life, or for updates on MCPS staff wellness programs. Follow the hashtag #mcpssstaffwellness for posts (formerly tweets)!

## Well Aware Toolbox

Well Aware, the MCPS employee wellness program, brings you the Well Aware Wellness Toolbox, a web page with many resources to help staff live healthy and well lives. 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. Studies show that self-care is essential to well-being, especially during times of uncertainty and transition. **Check out the Well Aware Toolbox to see what self-care resources will work best for you!**

## Free Access to Montgomery County 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. Please note: You need to reapply each year to continue your access to the facilities.

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**.