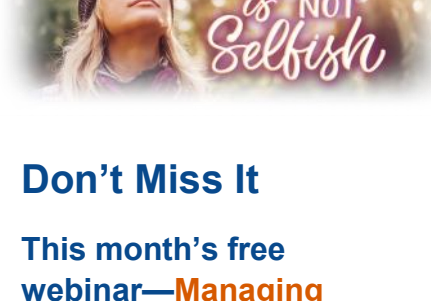


## May Well Aware eNews

Welcome to the May 2021 issue of the *Well Aware eNews!* Read on to learn about—

- this month's wellness champion, an ESOL counselor who lost weight and learned to manage her stress by immersing herself in Well Aware online classes;
- a webinar on the body's response to change and uncertainty and ways to better cope and fully relax;
- another session of InStep with Diabetes;
- how to join the *Mind-Body Reboot* challenge;
- National High Blood Pressure Education Month;
- online tools you can use to help you adjust to the return to school and offices; and
- more!



### Don't Miss It

#### This month's free webinar—**Managing Stress in Times of Change**

Join this webinar to learn about the body's response to change and uncertainty and learn ways to better cope and fully relax.

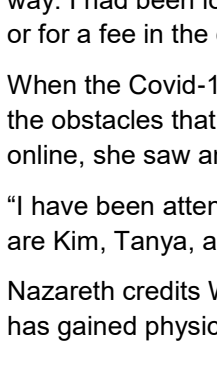
**Thursday, May 20, 2021**  
4:00–5:00 p.m.

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*

## Wellness Champion Sees a Chance to Make Wellness a Priority ... and Takes It



**Ms. Nazareth Aregai, ESOL counselor, Silver Spring International Middle School**

Nazareth Aregai, ESOL counselor, has always known that health and wellness were important to her. As with most people, though, it has been a challenge for her to make it a priority in her life.

"There was always one reason or another why I could not make it a priority," Nazareth said. "Being a mom, taking care of my parents, or my work schedule always seemed to get in the way. I had been looking into taking a yoga class, either for free at the Rocking Horse Center or for a fee in the community, but life interfered and I kept putting it off."

When the Covid-19 pandemic led to the closure of school buildings, it also removed some of the obstacles that stood in Nazareth's way. When Well Aware first offered yoga classes online, she saw an opportunity and took advantage of it.

"I have been attending consistently for over a year now," Nazareth said. "My favorite classes are Kim, Tanya, and Maureen's yoga classes. I also take Maricel's *Core and More* class."

Nazareth credits Well Aware's classes for the positive impact they have had on her. She has gained physical strength and stamina and has lowered her stress levels.

"I appreciate the fact that the classes are online and I can take them in the comfort of my own home," Nazareth said. "I don't have to worry about finding child care or rushing to drive to the classes from work. It also removes the sense of feeling self-conscious when practicing."

She also appreciates the holistic approach of the classes, particularly her yoga classes.

"The approach is holistic in addressing physical and mental well-being," Nazareth said. "The instructions are amazing and create a sense of connection and community that keeps you motivated and on task."

Nazareth has made other changes in her life that have led to big results.

"I walk when the weather permits and try to include my family in some of the activities, including walking, doing children's yoga, and playing soccer," Nazareth said. "I also have become more mindful of my eating habits. Through the combination of walking, my classes, and eating better, I have been able to lose more than 25 pounds during the pandemic."

Nazareth has some advice for those new to yoga or exercise. The first is to not give up.

"Some days it will seem like you cannot do any of the poses and your body is not cooperating, but this is normal, she said." "Like everything else in life, our body behaves differently every day. We just need to train it so that it creates muscle memories that will begin to ask for more! Don't let what you see on TV or the media about yoga intimidate you, and never underestimate its power. You don't have to bend like a pretzel! There are many modifications you can make. You only do what your body can handle."

## Well Aware Launches Online Health and Wellness "Toolbox"

Although many of us are returning to our schools or offices, Covid-19 is still with us. More than ever, it is essential that our wellness "toolbox" be filled with everything we need to make our mental and physical health a priority.

For that reason, Well Aware, the MCPS employee wellness program, has gathered together a number of resources to help you during this time of transition. Posted on the Well Aware web page, the **Well Aware Toolbox** can help staff adjust—both physical and mentally—to the return to their worksites. These tools include lists of free exercise and mindfulness classes and resources for improving sleep, nutrition, and more. Employees can use these tools as they continue to prioritize their health and wellness.

Well Aware welcomes you back to your school or office and encourages you to practice self-care. It is hugely important at this time.

Check out the **Well Aware Toolbox** to see what self-care resources will work best for you!

## InStep with Diabetes: Online Classes Coming Soon

InStep with Diabetes is a series of three one-hour classes to help you better understand diabetes and the lifestyle changes needed for healthy living. A Kaiser Permanente health educator will discuss not only why healthy eating, physical activity, and blood sugar control are important for diabetes management but also ways to incorporate these changes into your life. The facilitator also will share resources and travel tips to further support you.

You do not have to be diabetic or pre-diabetic (or a Kaiser Permanente member) to attend this course. Are you supporting a family member or friend with diabetes? You may attend to learn and share helpful information with them. Registration is open for our summer class. **Email Well Aware** to register or learn more.

## Wellness Initiatives: Complete Your Health Risk Assessment to Save on Your Health Insurance Premiums

Completing your health risk assessment each year gives you the information you need to take better control of your health and well-being. And that's important, because when you are running at 100 percent, being fit and in good spirits will go a long way to help you perform at your best.

Take your medical insurance plan's confidential, online questionnaire and in less than 20 minutes, you will—

- learn your risk levels for common health problems, including heart disease, colon cancer, and diabetes;
- get a clear picture of your current health status and learn how to improve your health in the future through preventive tests, chronic condition support, and online health coaching; and
- discover interactive tools and educational information that can give you more details on your health status.

Managing and improving your health has never been easier. And, when you complete your Health Risk Assessment by October 8, 2021, MCPS will pay 1 percent more of the total cost of your 2022 health insurance premiums—reducing your contribution by 1 percent. To get started, visit the **Wellness Initiatives for Employees web page**. You will find links for accessing the CareFirst and Kaiser Permanente Health Risk Assessments. You will also find helpful instructions to guide you through the log-in process.

**Learn more about Wellness Initiatives**, including another way to reduce the cost of your health insurance in 2022.



## Have You Joined the Mind/Body Reboot?

Across Montgomery County Public Schools (MCPS), employees are experiencing better health and morale because of their involvement in Well Aware's *Mind/Body Reboot* physical activity challenge. Some are participating as individuals; others as members of a team. They are enjoying better health and fitness as a result.

There is still time to join the challenge. Let the MCPS *Mind/Body Reboot* challenge inspire you to become your most active self. Participate to regain your health and win prizes! Simply enter your activity and weight loss updates in the online **Well Aware Fitness Log** by noon on Monday, May 24, 2021.

**Learn more** about the *Mind/Body Reboot* challenge.

### Stay tuned

Grand prize winners will be announced in the May 26<sup>th</sup> issue of *The Bulletin*.

### Spirit Award

Do you have a coworker who has gone above and beyond to help build a culture of wellness in your school or office? We are recognizing the MCPS employees who most encouraged others to live their healthiest lives. Ten Spirit Award winners will each receive a Zumba or Yoga class to be held at your school or office this fall. To request a Spirit Award nomination form, **email Well Aware**. Nominations are due by Monday, May 24, 2021.

### Don't stop now!

Maintain your active lifestyle and look for information about our fall wellness programs on the **Well Aware web page**, in the **Well Aware eNews**, on Twitter @mcpowellaware, and in **The Bulletin**.

## May Is National High Blood Pressure Education Month

Uncontrolled high blood pressure, or hypertension, is dangerous and far too common. In fact, one of every three adults in the United States has the condition. High blood pressure usually has no signs or symptoms, but it does have consequences. The only way to know if you are at risk for high blood pressure is to know your numbers.

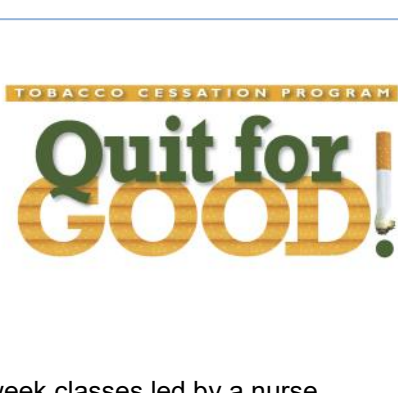
During National High Blood Pressure Education Month, the American Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute (NHLBI) is challenging Americans to control or lower high blood pressure. Talk with your health care team about a management plan. **See tips** on what to ask your doctor and lifestyle changes to help lower your blood pressure.

Your doctor may recommend that you adopt heart-healthy lifestyle changes, such as heart-healthy eating patterns like the **DASH eating plan**, alone or with medicines. Controlling or lowering blood pressure can also help prevent or delay high blood pressure complications, such as chronic kidney disease, heart attack, heart failure, stroke, and possibly vascular dementia.

High blood pressure control is a journey. There are small steps you can take every day to control high blood pressure and protect your heart. **Here are five ways to get started**. You also can **learn a deep breathing technique** to help control your blood pressure.

## It Is Your Turn to Quit for Good

TOBACCO CESSATION PROGRAM



MCPS and Kaiser Permanente are teaming up again 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.

The program is course-based and consists of once-a-week classes led by a nurse practitioner with assistance from Kaiser Permanente clinicians and health experts. Participants will learn the skills necessary to successfully live tobacco-free. Discussion topics will include risk assessment, stress management techniques, healthy weight management strategies, and more. In addition to the class meetings, participants will receive support through a help line, peer sponsors who understand what it takes to quit, and other resources.

Fall classes are forming! To add your name to the list for the next class, **email Well Aware**. Learn more about the program by visiting the **Well Aware website**.

## Stress Less This Spring

Yoga and meditation are wonderful practices that can help you reduce your stress levels while you learn techniques for managing pressure and anxiety. Join Well Aware as we continue to practice yoga and mindfulness online into the spring. For a monthly class schedule and links, **email Well Aware**.

## Join Us for Online 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.

MCPS is offering online Zumba, Zumba Toning, and HIITCamp classes. Our instructors make sure the class is perfect for beginners and experienced exercisers. To request a class schedule and register for a class, **email Well Aware**.

## Share Your Wellness Stories and Encourage Your Coworkers Through Twitter!

Well Aware is proud of MCPS employee for all of the hard work they are doing to lead healthy lives. It is time to share your stories and your spirit! Or, 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 us on Twitter @mcpowellaware for incredible wellness stories, ideas, and encouragement from your MCPS coworkers. You also will read tips on living a healthy life and receive updates on MCPS staff wellness programs. Follow hashtag #mcpstaffwellness for tweets!

## Montgomery County Offers MCPS Employees Free Access to Its Recreation Facilities

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** and visit 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 may reapply each year to continue your access to the facilities.

## Be Well 365 for Staff

MCPS has launched a well-being web page for its employees. This online resource is a one-stop shop where employees can find information to help them navigate and balance their work, home, personal, and community lives. The emphasis is on staff well-being and self-care. This has been a challenging time for all of us, and MCPS is committed to ensuring that its staff members stay safe and feel supported. **Browse Be Well 365**.

## BurnAlong Classes Available to Help You and Your Family Stay Well and Fit

MCPS and CareFirst have partnered to give you access to *BurnAlong*, a health and wellness platform that comes with four free accounts for you and interested family and friends. The 1000+ classes available range from meditation, boxing, yoga, bootcamp, and spin. There are even classes on nutrition and financial literacy and specialized senior classes for you or older members of your family who may need physical activity but need to remain in the house. Classes can also be taken as a group, so you can work out with a friend or family member while seeing and talking to each other during the class. **Register and log in**.

Did you miss the introductory webinar for *BurnAlong*? **Watch the webinar** now and learn about all of the exciting features the platform offers.

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**.