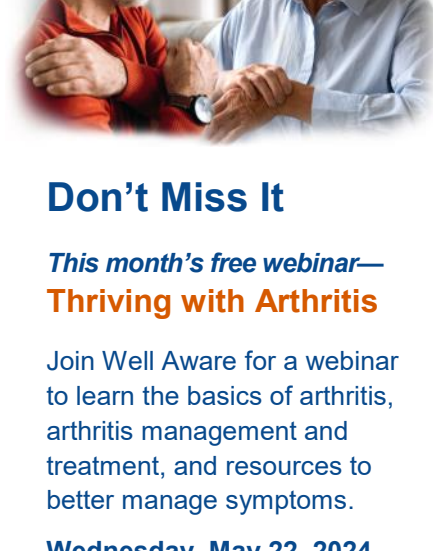


## May Well Aware eNews

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

- this month's wellness champion, an instructional specialist who took the *Head Heart Hands* behavior-change class and made significant improvements in her health;
- a webinar on the basics of arthritis, its management and treatment, and resources to help you better manage symptoms;
- Mental Health Awareness month;
- National High Blood Pressure Education Month;
- Well Aware's virtual celebration of Teacher Appreciation Week;
- the *Head Heart Hands* class; and
- more!



### Don't Miss It

#### This month's free webinar— Thriving with Arthritis

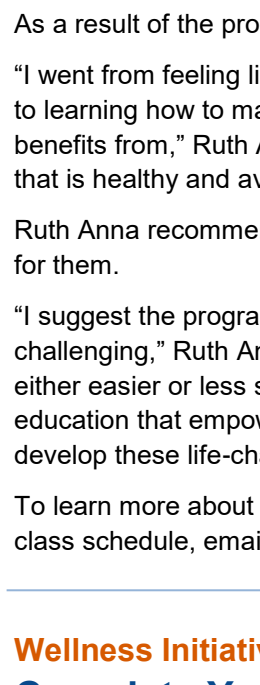
Join Well Aware for a webinar to learn the basics of arthritis, arthritis management and treatment, and resources to better manage symptoms.

**Wednesday, May 22, 2024**  
Webinar  
4:30–6:00 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**.

## Wellness Champion Shifts Perspective: Healthy Choices That Were a Compromise Now Are Options She Controls and Enjoys



### Ms. Ruth Anna Skowronski, instructional specialist, Office of Special Education

Like many of us, Ms. Ruth Anna Skowronski, instructional specialist in the Office of Special Education, is getting older and facing some health issues. She values her health and wellness, so, last fall, she attended an introductory session of the *Head Heart Hands* program. With a goal of developing a healthier lifestyle, Ruth Anna decided to sign up.

"Health and wellness are important to me because mental sharpness, physical activity, and the ability to deal with emotional stress are key to growing older comfortably," Ruth Anna said. "Now that I am in my 60s, I am dealing daily with health concerns that affect my family, friends, and myself. Life can be challenging, and we need to consider how much our lifestyle choices impact our ability to deal with our daily routine."

The *Head Heart Hands* program is a comprehensive program with lessons and weekly group coaching. It is designed to help participants prevent/reverse disease, and improve their physical and mental health.

"Over the course of the program, the wealth of information shared in our meetings made a healthy lifestyle appealing, accessible, and manageable," Ruth Anna said. "I enjoyed meeting the other participants and sharing our struggles as we all faced issues in our lives that brought us to the class."

As a result of the program, Ruth Anna made a significant shift in her approach to wellness.

"I went from feeling like the choices I make while dealing with diabetes are a compromise, to learning how to make positive food and exercise choices that I control and enjoy the benefits from," Ruth Anna said. "My A1C has lowered, and I learned to build a meal plan that is healthy and avoids processed foods."

Ruth Anna recommends that other MCPS staff look into this program and decide if it is right for them.

"I suggest the program to other MCPS staff because we know our jobs are enriching yet challenging," Ruth Anna said. "The food we consume and how we exercise can make life either easier or less satisfying. *Head Heart Hands* provides a wealth of tools and nutrition education that empower us to implement change and be kind to ourselves while we develop these life-changing skills."

To learn more about the *Head Heart Hands* program and request the upcoming summer class schedule, email **Well Aware**.

## 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 4, 2024, MCPS will pay 1 percent more of the total cost of your 2025 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 Cigna and Kaiser Permanente Health Risk Assessments. You will also find helpful instructions to guide you through the log-in process.

**Learn more** about how you can reduce your health insurance costs in 2025 and beyond through the Wellness Initiatives program.

## Have You Reached the Beach?

Across Montgomery County Public Schools (MCPS), employees are experiencing better health and morale because of their involvement in the Well Aware *Reach the Beach* physical activity challenge.

Some employees are participating as individuals; others as members of a team. They are enjoying better health and fitness as a result.

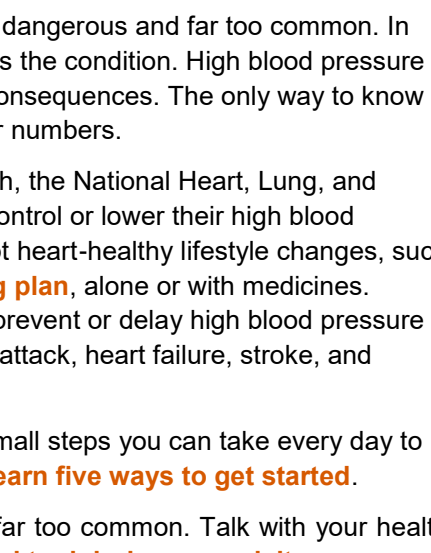
The challenge ends on Sunday, May 5. You will need to enter your activity in the online **Well Aware Fitness Log** by noon on Monday, May 6, 2024. Visit the **Reach the Beach web page** for details.

### Stay Tuned

Grand prize winners will be announced in the May 8<sup>th</sup> issue of *The Bulletin*.

### 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 X (formerly known as Twitter) @mcpswellaware, 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 National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute (NHLBI) is challenging Americans to control or lower their high 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. **Learn five ways to get started.**

Uncontrolled high blood pressure is dangerous and far too common. Talk with your health care team about a management plan. **Use this helpful tool during your visit.**

Schedule a **Well Aware health screening** to learn your blood pressure. You also will get credit for your completing your biometric health screening for 2025 if you are covered by an MCPS-provided medical plan.

**Learn a deep breathing technique** to help control blood pressure at any time.

## 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 well-being. Spring is a wonderful time to get outside and enjoy nature. **Check out this video** to learn more information on how nature helps mental health.

In addition to spending more time in nature, Well Aware is continuing its 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** for more information.

## 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!

From Zumba, to HIITCamp, Stretch and Mobility, Core, Yoga, and toning classes, we offer many classes to meet your needs. **Email Well Aware** to get the monthly calendar of classes.

## Well Aware to Offer Personal Wellness Activities During Teacher Appreciation Week

Well Aware is holding a virtual celebration of Teacher Appreciation Week! Join us for the following events that will provide a space for connection, relaxation, and creativity:

**May 7, 2024**  
5:00 p.m.  
Art Therapy/Workshop

**May 8, 2024**  
4:30 p.m.  
Empowering Educators to Lead Healthy Lives through Disease Prevention  
**Zoom Meeting**  
Meeting ID: 819 0921 7321

**May 9, 2024**  
5:00 p.m.  
Sound Meditation

## 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? Not to worry. 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: mcpsmd.

## Omada for Cigna and Kaiser Permanente Members

Omada is a personalized program that helps members lose weight and create long-lasting health changes.

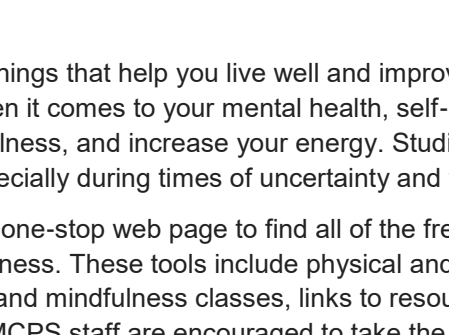
Qualifying participants receive the following:

- 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** for MCPS participants.

## Well Aware and the Employee Assistance Program

### Monthly Connection: Mental Health 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

May is Mental Health Awareness Month. We can all work together to increase awareness and acceptance, and reduce prejudice and discrimination about mental illness. The **Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration** estimates that more than one in five U.S. adults experienced a mental illness in the past year. Learn about different types of **mental health conditions** from the National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI). And know that how we talk about mental health matters. Check out these resources to learn more:

- **Say This, Not This: Speaking About Mental Health** (NAMI California)
- **How to Start (and Continue) a Conversation about Mental Health** (American Foundation for Suicide Prevention)
- **Tips for Talking with a Health Care Provider About Your Mental Health** (National Institute of Mental Health)

World Maternal Mental Health Day was held on May 1, 2024, and National Women's Health Week will be held May 12–May 18, 2024. Women are more likely than men to experience certain mental health disorders, and certain types of depression can occur at different stages of life. Learn more about women and mental health:

- **Women and Mental Health** (National Institute of Mental Health)
- **Mental Health Conditions** (Office on Women's Health)
- **Depression in Women: 4 Things to Know** (National Institute of Mental Health)
- **World Maternal Mental Health Day**

#### Well Aware Resources

MCPS-provided medical insurance vendors have excellent resources for physical and mental health needs. Both medical plans offer video visits too, which makes mental health care more accessible. Whether you are a member of Cigna or Kaiser Permanente, you will find your options below:

Cigna—

- **Mental Health Support**
- **Lifestyle Management**
- **Video Visits**

Kaiser Permanente—

- **Mental Health Resources and Tools**
- **Self-Care Resources**
- **Video Visits**

## Wellbeats Is Here to Support Your Mental Health

In our always-on, always-online world, it can be hard to carve out time for self-care. But taking time to care for your mental health can lead to improved mood, clearer thinking, and reduced anxiety.

Whether it's going for a guided walk, trying a new recipe, or just taking a minute to focus on your breath, we all could use a little boost in our day. Explore on-demand, expert-led fitness, nutrition, and mindfulness classes on Wellbeats Wellness.

Wellbeats offers a 24/7 virtual fitness, nutrition, and mindfulness classes that are free for MCPS staff. 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. Check out the **flyer** for login information. In the meantime, enjoy this **welcome video**.

## Group Forming Now for Summer Session of Head Heart Hands

Registration is underway for a summer session of *Head Heart Hands*, a fun and inspiring program that gives participants the knowledge, tools, and support to lose weight permanently and reach their health goals.

This 12-week wellness program is a comprehensive program of learning with weekly group coaching, designed to help participants prevent/reverse disease, improve their physical and mental health, and lose weight. This holistic program targets the root causes of common chronic diseases, including type 2 diabetes, high blood pressure, high cholesterol, arthritis, and more, while addressing all aspects of health, including nutrition, sleep, stress, mental health, and mindset.

**Email Well Aware** for more information and to register.

## 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!**

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**.