

February Well Aware eNews

Welcome to the February 2022 issue of the *Well Aware eNews*! Read on to learn about—

- this month's wellness champions, a high school *Pile on the Miles* team whose members got healthier, bonded over exercise, and had a lot of fun during the fall physical activity challenge;
- a webinar on the chronic disease risks for African Americans, the warning signs for stroke and heart attack, and ways to reduce your risk for chronic disease;
- your medical plan's online tools and resources;
- this year's *Flights to Fitness* challenge;
- the *Heart Health* webinar series;
- *Wellbeats*, an online platform with high-quality fitness and mindfulness videos; and
- more!



Don't Miss It

This month's free webinar—Addressing Chronic Disease Among African Americans

Understand the chronic disease risks for African Americans. Learn the warning signs for stroke and heart attack and ways to reduce your risk for chronic disease.

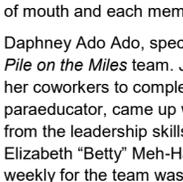
Thursday, February 24, 2022
 4:30–5:30 p.m.

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](#).

Presented by:
 Kaiser Permanente

Wellness Champions Make a "True Team Effort" During Well Aware's Latest Challenge



The Blazing Bulldogs Pile on the Miles Team, Churchill High School

Churchill High School's Blazing Bulldogs *Pile on the Miles* Team had fun, bonded over exercise, and got healthier during Well Aware's fall physical activity challenge, *Pile on the Miles*. The team celebrated the end of the challenge with a group picture and shared individual and collective accomplishments.

Lorna Solomon, special education teacher, was motivated by the challenge and enjoyed coordinating with others to see it through at Churchill.

"I loved the support I received, and although we walked separately due to COVID, it felt like a true group effort," Lorna said. "The Blazing Bulldogs developed organically by word of mouth and each member contributed to the group's success."

Daphney Ado Ado, special education paraeducator, initiated the conversation to form the *Pile on the Miles* team. Jana Coffey, special education teacher, gave gentle reminders to her coworkers to complete their [Well Aware Fitness Logs](#) on time. Linda Lotzi, paraeducator, came up with the team name: *Blazing Bulldogs*. The group benefited from the leadership skills (i.e., "boss power") Ericka Mbachu, resource teacher, offered. Elizabeth "Betty" Meh-Haaland served as the team's unflinching cheerleader. Winning weekly for the team was Karen Strause, school secretary.

Daphney had a number of great reasons to suggest the school join the challenge.

"Working together as a team makes a challenge motivational, engaging, and exciting, while teammates encourage each other to reach their goals," Daphney said. "I appreciate my colleagues sharing their journey and providing tips to help us keep the pace."

Jana also appreciated the support and motivation she received from the challenge.

"Knowing my team was counting on me to add in my steps each week increased my average weekly step count," Jana said. "Being able to talk to like-minded coworkers kept me motivated as well."

Lorna found that, in addition to motivating her to exercise, the challenge benefited her in other ways.

"This challenge kept me motivated," Lorna said. "I began by walking 10,000 steps each day and was motivated to incorporate strength training and running three to four times per week. I felt genuinely more content and believe the challenge helped me become a better colleague."

Team members agree that making health and wellness a priority is essential for school staff for challenges that may go beyond those that Well Aware promotes for its physical activity challenges.

"Health and wellness is important to classroom staff because it enables us to maximize the impact we have on students," Lorna said. "With improvements in our muscle endurance, energy levels, mood, cognition, memory, sleep, balance and coordination, and immune system, and by reducing stress and tension, we can be our best selves and much more effective in the classroom."

Jana would agree.

"I like the saying, 'You can't pour from an empty cup,'" Jana said. "To me, that means I must remember to take care of myself so I can give to others. When we focus on our health, our cups stay fuller and we are more likely to be able to continue nurturing and helping others."

That was certainly true for Daphney.

"I wanted to build muscle and maintain an active lifestyle, which meant I needed to keep my vision focused and use my time wisely every day," Daphney said. "In the Bridge department at Churchill, our daily work requires an alert mindset. We must keep stress at a minimum and a smile on our faces while working with our students. This challenge helped me to do all of the above!"

The teammates have suggestions for staff who are considering joining the next challenge that begins in the spring.

"Even if reluctant, everyone should participate in a Well Aware challenge, if only for the camaraderie," Daphney said. "Along with making health and wellness a priority, maintain a positive team spirit and just have fun!"

Today Is National Wear Red Day!

Are you seeing red?

The American Heart Association (AHA) is holding its yearly National Wear Red Day today, Friday, February 4, 2022, to call attention to heart disease. According to AHA, "Heart disease and stroke cause 1 in 3 deaths among women each year, killing approximately one woman every 80 seconds." It doesn't have to be that way, however. AHA tells us that "80 percent of cardiac and stroke events may be prevented with education and action."

Well Aware encourages all Montgomery County Public Schools employees to make their heart health a priority. Schedule your annual preventive check-up to review your overall health, measure your blood pressure, and check your cholesterol. Be alert for signs of heart disease and your risk for stroke and other illnesses.

Do your part to educate yourself, your friends, and your family this year. Join the movement to end heart disease and strokes in women because it's not just a man's disease. Even if you didn't wear red today, we can *all* Go Red! Here's how:

G: Get Your Numbers

O: Own Your Lifestyle

R: Realize Your Risk

E: Educate Your Family

D: Don't Be Silent

Be sure to [watch this video](#) for more information about why you should Go Red.

Is your school, office, or depot participating in Wear Red Day in honor of women's heart health? Take a picture of your staff and [email it to Well Aware](#).

Your Medical Plan's Online Tools

Both Kaiser Permanente and CareFirst offer many online tools and resources to help you on your health and wellness journey. These programs are included in your monthly premium cost, so make sure to take advantage of what is available to you!

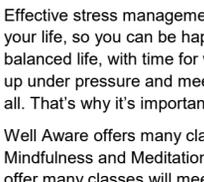
CareFirst online tools:

- [Apps](#)
- [Coaching](#)
- [Scaleback Lifestyle Program](#)

Kaiser Permanente online tools:

- [Apps \(English\)](#)
- [Apps \(Spanish\)](#)
- [Coaching](#)
- [Healthy Resources](#)

Flights to Fitness: Climb America's Tallest Buildings!



Stair climbing can be a wonderful way to keep fit. Most of us live and/or work in or near a building with stairs. Stair can be done anytime throughout the day as a break in your routine. The activity benefits your heart, your mind, as well as your leg muscles.

Well Aware is challenging you to climb the tallest buildings in America, or climb the equivalent of these buildings in flights of stairs. Form a team and complete the buildings together to share your sense of achievement! It is a great way to stay in shape during the cold winter months.

For details, visit Well Aware's [Flights to Fitness web page](#).

Heart Health Webinar Series

Well Aware and CareFirst have teamed together to offer a webinar series focusing on heart health. The series is geared towards those diagnosed with high cholesterol, high blood pressure, or a metabolic disease and are held virtually and recorded for later viewing

1. **Blood Pressure: A Vital Force for Life**—Explains the importance of healthy blood pressure, risk factors for high blood pressure, and how to take control of those risks.
[View recording of webinar held in January](#)

2. **Understanding Cholesterol: Your Key to Heart Health**—Identifies the components of cholesterol and what they mean, lifestyle factors that can impact and improve levels, and simple tips to keep cholesterol in a healthy range.
Wednesday February 9, 2022
 4:30 p.m.

2. **Metabolic Syndrome: Are You at Risk?**—Defines metabolic syndrome, identifies who is at risk, and explains how to reduce that risk.
Wednesday February 23, 2022
 4:30 p.m.

[Email Well Aware](#) to register for these classes.

Stress Less This Winter

Shorter days with less sunlight combined with cold weather lead to a more sedentary lifestyle. This can make a big difference in your mood and stress levels.

Effective stress management, on the other hand, helps you break the hold 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.

Well Aware offers many classes virtually to help you learn tools to manage stress. From Mindfulness and Meditation, to Seated Yoga, Yoga, Stretch and Mobility, and Pilates, we offer many classes will meet your needs. [Email Well Aware](#) to request a monthly schedule of classes.

Take the [Wellness] Initiatives Reduce Your Share of Health Insurance Costs for 2023

If you are covered by an MCPS-provided medical insurance plan through CareFirst or Kaiser Permanente, you can learn more about your health and reduce your contributions to your 2023 health insurance with the Wellness Initiatives program. To take full advantage of these rate reductions, complete a biometric health screening and a health risk assessment yearly.

The Wellness Initiatives are very simple to accomplish. To receive the maximum 2 percent reduction on your health insurance premiums in 2023, you have until October 7, 2022, to complete your annual—

- biometric health assessment, and
- biometric health screening.

To find out how to complete your biometric health screening and health risk assessment and how your results will be reported to MCPS, please visit the [Wellness Initiatives web page](#).

Online Physical Activity Classes for Winter

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 Well Aware's online classes to see what kind of physical activity is best for you. We offer many classes to meet your needs, including Zumba, HIIT Camp, Stretch and Mobility, Core workouts, Yoga, and toning.

[Email Well Aware](#) for a monthly calendar of classes.

Healthy Habits to Prevent Heart Disease

February is Heart Disease Awareness Month. Did you know that every 40 seconds, someone in the United States has a heart attack? One of the most important lifestyle modifications that can significantly reduce the risk of developing heart disease, is regular exercise—which can be hard to fit in to our busy lives! Read about the [link between exercise and a lowered risk of heart disease](#). Learn [more](#) about the three types of exercises that boost heart health.

Access to Wellbeats Coming Soon!

MCPS and CareFirst are partnering to give you access to Wellbeats, an online platform with high quality, one to 60-minute videos, from fitness to mindfulness, for every age. Equitable, scalable, and easy-to-use, workout to virtual fitness classes on your phone, computer, television, or smart board! Schedule time with a coworker, and workout as a group!

Choose from 1,000+ classes for all ability levels including yoga, HIIT, strength training, running and walking, mindfulness and meditation, nutrition and recipes, cycling, circuits, kickboxing, dance, work breaks, stretching, and so much more. New classes are added regularly to the Wellbeats app. [Learn more](#).

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 MCPS Staff

Did you know MCPS has 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. The last few months have been challenging ones for all of us, and MCPS is committed to ensuring that its staff members stay safe and feel supported. [Browse Be Well 365](#).

Share Your Wellness Stories and Encourage Your Coworkers Through Twitter!

Well Aware is proud of all of the hard work that MCPS employee are doing to live a healthy and well life. It is time to share your stories and your spirit! Or, do you need motivation to start a staff wellness program or change an individual behavior? Follow [@mcpswellaware](#) for incredible stories, wellness ideas, encouragement from your MCPS coworkers, tips on living a healthy life, or updates on MCPS staff wellness activities.