

# MCPS Employee Wellness Program

## May Wellness eNews

Welcome to the May issue of Employee Wellness eNews!

Read on to learn about—

- the difference between a cold and seasonal allergies;
- how our May wellness champion is helping to make fitness a learning tool;
- understanding your blood pressure; and
- treating high blood pressure without medication.

### Is it a cold or is it allergies?

Although [colds](#) and allergies share some of the same symptoms, here are ways that you can tell the difference between these two common conditions:

- Colds and other common [respiratory infections](#) are caused by viruses and often last a week to 10 days. Allergies can persist for weeks or even longer. However, it is possible to come in contact with an allergen, such as a cat or dog, that triggers an immediate, short-term reaction.
- Cold symptoms can take up to several days to develop after exposure to the virus, while allergy symptoms develop within minutes to hours after you've had contact with an allergen such as pollen or mold.
- Cold symptoms may appear one at a time (for example, a sore throat, then sneezing, then a runny nose), while allergy symptoms typically happen all at once.
- Colds occur more often during the fall and winter months. Allergies can flare up at any time—from spring through the fall from pollinating plants, and year-round from allergens such as mold or dust.
- A low fever can accompany a cold, but a fever doesn't occur with allergies—despite the famous name "hay fever."
- The treatments for colds and allergies are different.

Learn more about allergies and how to avoid common allergy triggers by visiting the [Kaiser Permanente website](#).

Adapted with permission from "Is it a Cold or Is it Allergies?" <http://kp.org/allergies> (April 4, 2011).

### Don't miss it!

*Heart Smart: Managing High Blood Pressure and Blood Pressure Screenings*

**May 18**  
Screenings: 3:30–4:30 p.m. & 5:30–6:30 p.m.  
Seminar: 4:30–5:30 p.m.  
**Carver Educational Services Center (CESC) Cafeteria**  
850 Hungerford Dr.  
Rockville, MD 20855

**May 19**  
Screenings: 3:30–4:30 p.m.  
Seminar: 4:30–5:30 p.m.  
**Northwood High School Cafeteria**  
919 University Blvd West  
Silver Spring, MD 20901

Presented by:



### Wellness Champion



**Meet Jade Pridgeon, Carl Sandburg Learning Center Paraeducator**

Jade Pridgeon got some recent doctor's orders: lose weight or suffer ill health. Jade took the advice to heart, transforming her diet and exercise routine. She participates in the Carl Sandburg Mighty Miler program, which is encouraging students and staff to run or walk 25 miles by May 15. Participant mileage is compiled and used in the classroom to make real-life math connections. Different level classrooms use the data to learn addition, subtraction, and even graphing skills. Jade's passion and success—she has lost 20 pounds—have been contagious. Jade has encouraged her coworkers to make similar lifestyle changes, earning her the MCPS on the Move spirit award for her ability to motivate others at her location.

## High Blood Pressure



### What is high blood pressure?

Blood pressure is a measure of how hard the blood pushes against the walls of your arteries as it moves through your body. It's normal for blood pressure to go up and down throughout the day, but if it remains up, you have high blood pressure. Another name for high blood pressure is hypertension.

When blood pressure is high, it starts to damage the blood vessels, heart, and kidneys. This can lead to [heart attack](#), [stroke](#), and other problems. High blood pressure is called a "silent killer" because it doesn't usually cause symptoms while it is causing this damage.

### Know Your Numbers

Your blood pressure consists of two numbers: [systolic and diastolic](#). Someone with a systolic pressure of 120 and a diastolic pressure of 80 has a blood pressure of 120/80, or "120 over 80."

- The systolic number shows how hard the blood pushes when the heart is pumping.
- The diastolic number shows how hard the blood pushes between heartbeats when the heart is relaxed and filling with blood.

Adults should have a blood pressure of less than 120/80. High blood pressure is 140/90 or higher. Many adults fall into the category in between, called pre-hypertension. Adults who have pre-hypertension need to make lifestyle changes to bring their blood pressure down and help prevent or delay high blood pressure.

There are many options for treating high blood pressure. Speak with your health professional today and read on for tips on handling high blood pressure.

Adapted with permission from "High Blood Pressure" <http://kp.org> (April 7, 2011).

## 5 Ways to Lower Your Blood Pressure Without Medication

**Hypertension strikes one in three American adults. Learn the top lifestyle strategies that can make a real impact on lowering your blood pressure.**

About one in every three American adults has hypertension or high blood pressure. Medication is often prescribed but that's not the only solution. There are many lifestyle strategies that also have been shown to have an impact. For some, weight loss, combined with exercise and a healthy eating plan, may even reduce or eliminate the need for medication altogether.

Your doctor can help you decide whether to take a combined approach (medication plus lifestyle) or whether to try following these healthy lifestyle strategies first:

1. **Increase exercise.** Aerobic exercise can lower blood pressure and can also help with weight loss. It doesn't take a time-consuming workout in a gym to reap the benefits.
  - As few as 30 minutes of moderate exercise on most days of the week has been shown to be effective.
  - Aerobic activities such as walking, biking, swimming, and water aerobics often produce the best results.
  - Before you start an exercise program, ask your doctor what type and amount of exercise is right for you.
2. **Cut your salt intake.** One teaspoon (2,400 mg) is the maximum recommended daily amount. Reducing this to two thirds of a teaspoon (1,500 mg) can make a big difference.
  - Check labels of food and over-the-counter medication for their sodium content.
  - Use herbs and spices instead of salt to flavor foods.
  - Avoid processed foods such as canned and frozen ready-to-eat foods, cheeses, and lunch-eat meats.
3. **Eat a healthy diet.** Follow the [DASH \(Dietary Approaches to Stop Hypertension\) guidelines](#). This has been shown to lower systolic and diastolic blood pressure even without other interventions.
  - The DASH diet is rich in fruits, vegetables, whole grains, and low-fat dairy products. It restricts intake of saturated fats, red meat, and sugar.
  - The increased fiber, potassium, calcium, and magnesium from these foods are all believed to play a role in reducing blood pressure.
4. **Lose weight.** For every two pounds of weight loss, you can lower your systolic pressure by one point and your diastolic pressure by 1.4 points.
  - Gradual weight loss of one to two pounds per week is most effective.
  - Keep a food journal to track exactly what and how much you eat.
  - Choose foods low in saturated fat, cholesterol, trans fats, and refined sugar.
  - Watch your portion sizes. Read the article in the [March wellness eNews](#) to learn more.
  - Do not skip meals. Eating three meals a day plus snacks is essential in weight management.
  - Aim for 25 to 30 grams of fiber daily, which will fill you up and curb your hunger.
5. **Limit alcohol.** Drinking excessive alcohol can raise blood pressure.
  - This means no more than one drink per day for women, two drinks for men.
  - One drink is the equivalent of 12 ounces of beer, five ounces of wine, or two ounces of hard liquor.



You can also help yourself to relax and cope better with stress from your busy life with these techniques:

- **Simplify.** Try to cut out activities that eat up your time but deliver little value. Learn to say "no." Clean out your house, car, and garage of things that you no longer need. Let go of relationships that complicate your life more than they add.
- **Take a deep breath.** Making a conscious effort to deepen and slow down your breathing can help you relax.
- **Exercise.** Physical activity is a natural stress-buster.
- **Get plenty of sleep.** Being sleep-deprived can make your problems seem bigger than they really are.

The key is to discover what works for you. Choose your strategies, take action and start enjoying the benefits. You can lower your blood pressure and help prevent other chronic diseases at the same time.

Used with permission from "5 Ways to Lower Your Blood Pressure without Medication" <http://uhctools.com> (April 4, 2011).