

October Well Aware eNews

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

- this month's wellness champions, a team of three whose love of mindfulness practices led them to develop a mindfulness retreat for teachers;
- a webinar on how to maintain healthy joints;
- the importance of getting a flu shot;
- breast cancer awareness resources from Well Aware and the Employee Assistance Program;
- the latest from Wellbeats;
- another Virtual Staff Wellness Day;
- Omada's *Foods that Fuel Immunity* webinar; and
- more!



Don't Miss It

This month's free webinar— Maintaining Healthy Joints

Joint concerns are an inevitable part of life, and the right mix of prevention and care is vital to optimizing physical ability. Learn how to protect your joints to support their function and health.

Wednesday, October 26, 2023
4:30 p.m.–5:30 p.m.

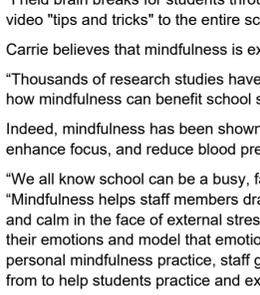
Please **email Well Aware** to register for the webinar. After registering, you will receive a link to the webinar in your Outlook email as well as an Outlook calendar reminder.

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

Presented by: Kaiser Permanente

Wellness Champions Develop a Mindfulness Retreat for Teachers

Ms. Jeanne K. Johnston, ESOL and reading initiatives teacher at Sligo Creek Elementary School; Mrs. Carrie P. Vieira, instructional specialist, Restorative Justice Unit; and Mariana Cruz, contractor and mindfulness specialist, Yoga for Youth



Jeanne Johnston, ESOL and reading initiative teacher; Carrie P. Vieira, instructional specialist; and Mariana Cruz, contractor and mindfulness specialist have taken their love for mindfulness and helped develop a mindfulness retreat for MCPS teachers. In spring 2021, the retreat idea turned into reality when teachers were offered an opportunity to practice and share mindfulness techniques at the Lathrop E. Smith Environmental Education Center.

A second retreat took place this past summer at the center, which included a sound bath healer, seated yoga in the tree house, mindful walking, reflective journaling, and feedback from students who shared their experiences while taking mindfulness as a middle-school elective.

Jeanne found mindfulness helped her get through a very difficult time in her life. She underwent chemotherapy, a mastectomy, and reconstructive surgery for breast cancer in 2015.

"I didn't really fully experience the mind-heart-body connection until going through that," Jeanne said. "Meditation became part of my healing process. When I was physically able to reintroduce vinyasa yoga, it then became an integral part of my physical and mental growth, measured in true baby steps!

After returning to the classroom, Jeanne began incorporating yoga and mindfulness into student instruction.

"I held brain breaks for students throughout the day, and even offered weekly mindfulness video "tips and tricks" to the entire school community," Jeanne said.

Carrie believes that mindfulness is extremely valuable for school staff.

"Thousands of research studies have now been done that show really promising results for how mindfulness can benefit school staff," Carrie said.

Indeed, mindfulness has been shown to reduce anxiety, improve sleep, increase calm, enhance focus, and reduce blood pressure, among other benefits.

"We all know school can be a busy, fast-paced, stressful environment," Carrie said. "Mindfulness helps staff members draw attention inward to find and maintain steadiness and calm in the face of external stressors or pressures. It also helps school staff regulate their emotions and model that emotional regulation for their students. By having their own personal mindfulness practice, staff gain authentic insights and experiences they can draw from to help students practice and experience the benefits of mindfulness as well."

Mariana suggests there is not a one-size-fits-all approach to mindfulness.

"Explore different techniques to find the ones that resonate most for you in meeting your goals, enhance your enjoyment, and motivate you to continue returning to it," Mariana said. A regular practice is key to experiencing the benefits of mindfulness, even if it's five minutes a day."

MCPS offers a number of mindfulness-based resources, curriculum guides, and professional development opportunities. **Check out the MCPS Mindfulness website.**

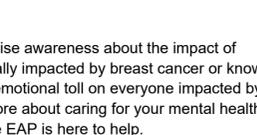
Jeanne and Carrie have other suggestions for MCPS staff interested in starting a mindfulness journey.

"We are fortunate to be living in a time in which mindfulness offerings are everywhere, especially through apps, podcasts, and other online resources," Jeanne said. "There's so much available; I'm still discovering them every day."

MCPS offers free *Staff Mindful Mondays* via Zoom each week from 5:15–6:00 p.m. for those who wish to practice with others in our community. Access the sessions at this **Zoom link** (meeting ID: 829 8043 4434; passcode: 96683).

Well Aware and the Employee Assistance Program

Monthly Connection: October is Breast Cancer Awareness Month



Did you know that mental and physical health are linked? Recent research has shown that 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* and *The Bulletin*, on the **Well Aware Toolbox** and **EAP** web pages, and more!

Breast Cancer Awareness Month

Other than skin cancer, breast cancer is the most common cancer among American women. Each October, people from all over the world show their support for those affected by breast cancer and raise awareness for screening, treatment, and prevention.

EAP Resources:

Breast Cancer Awareness Month is a time to raise awareness about the impact of breast cancer. Whether you have been personally impacted by breast cancer or know someone who has, breast cancer can take an emotional toll on everyone impacted by a diagnosis. Visit the below resources to learn more about caring for your mental health while navigating cancer, and remember that the EAP is here to help.

- **Emotions and Cancer**
- **Support Groups**
- **Support for Caregivers**

EAP is here to help. You may call the in-house EAP at 240-314-1040 (Monday–Friday 8:30 a.m. –5:00 p.m.) or our external partner EAP at 866-496-9599 (24/7/365).

Well Aware Resources:

In May 2023, the United States Preventive Services Task Force (USPSTF) issued new draft recommendations for breast cancer screening that, notably, lowered the age at which women should start screening from 50 to 40 years old.

- **Learn more** about screening guidelines.
- **Learn about your family's cancer history, genetic counseling, and lifestyle choices.**
- **Learn what it means if your mammogram indicates you have dense breasts.**

On Friday October 13, 2023, join your MCPS coworkers and wear pink to raise breast cancer awareness. This is a great opportunity to speak with coworkers, family, and friends about breast cancer warning signs and to encourage self-checks and mammograms. Take pictures of yourself wearing pink and **email them to Well Aware**.

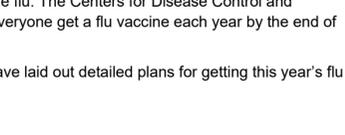
It Is Easier Than Ever to Quit for Good

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.

Now shorter in length and held via webinar, it is easier than ever to take the first steps to quitting, for good. Join us as we discuss the skills necessary to successfully give up smoking and live tobacco-free.

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

Fall Physical Activity Challenge Reprise: MCPS On the Move



In 2010, Well Aware held its inaugural physical activity challenge: *MCPS on the Move*. The challenge encouraged staff to adopt lifelong exercise and healthy eating habits. *MCPS on the Move* emphasized consistency over athleticism and encouraged participants to incorporate simple, physical activities into their daily routines.

This fall, we are reprising *MCPS on the Move* to continue Well Aware's goal of building long-lasting healthy habits. Participate as an individual or on a team! Schools and offices can work together and create their own *MCPS on the Move* teams, encourage activity, and support each other through this eight-week activity challenge.

While we are already a few weeks into the challenge, it is not too late to start! **Learn more about MCPS on the Move!**

Avoid the Flu This Year: Get Your Flu Shot Before the End of October

The best way to prevent flu and its potentially serious complications is by getting a yearly flu vaccine. Even when a flu vaccination does not prevent illness entirely, it has been shown in several studies to reduce the severity of illness in people who get vaccinated but still get sick.

The typical flu is active each year from October through April. An estimated 5-20 percent of Americans get the flu each year with symptoms lasting for up to two weeks.

The flu vaccine takes about two weeks to be effective, so it is important to get the vaccine as early as possible. During the two weeks after vaccination, antibodies develop in the body and provide protection against the flu. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommends that everyone get a flu vaccine each year by the end of October.

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.

Omada for Cigna Members

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.

Qualifying participants will 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**. To apply, visit **Omada Health**.

Omada to Offer All MCPS Employees Its *Foods that Fuel Immunity* Webinar

Join Omada for *Foods that Fuel Immunity*, a webinar on nutrition. You do not need to be a Cigna member to participate in this webinar.

Wednesday October 18, 2023
4:30 p.m.

To register, **email Well Aware**.

Wellness Initiatives

TODAY is the Deadline to Save Money on Your Health Insurance in 2024!

The Wellness Initiatives deadline is today!

The Montgomery County Public Schools (MCPS) Wellness Initiatives program provides you with incentives to reduce your health insurance costs. If you are covered by an MCPS-provided medical insurance plan, complete a biometric health screening and your insurance provider's online health risk assessment by October 6, 2023—and yearly thereafter—to take advantage of the rate reductions in 2024 and beyond.

You can pay 1 percent less of the total cost of your health insurance in 2024 by seeing your doctor or, if you are a Cigna member, visiting a Quest Patient Services Center for an annual physical. For an additional 1 percent credit, complete a health risk assessment on your medical plan's website by October 6, 2023.

Kaiser Permanente members: Be sure to log in to your Kaiser Permanente incentive portal to consent to your participation in the program. Without your consent, your information will not be reported.

Take the Wellness Initiative! **Learn more.**

Stress Less This Fall

As summer winds down, and we get back into the fall routine, 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 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 online virtual live and recorded classes, and adding some onsite classes for your convenience. From yoga 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 continuing its online virtual live 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.**

Virtual Cooking Demonstration: Dried Fruits in Fall and Winter

Save the date and join us for *Dried Fruits in Fall and Winter*, a virtual cooking demonstration! Golden raisins, dried cranberries, figs, dried apricots, dried tart cherries, dried blueberries, dates, dried plums, and dried currants can be enjoyed alone for their delicious flavors and can be used in sweet or savory recipes. As compared to various forms of added sugars, the natural sweetness from dried fruit is associated with a number of nutrients. Join us to learn more about making and enjoying dried fruits!

Tuesday October 24, 2023
5:00 p.m.

Email Well Aware to register.

A Virtual Staff Wellness Day is Coming!

On Wednesday, November 1, 2023, Well Aware, Kaiser Permanente, and Cigna are coming together to present a virtual wellness day! Take a few minutes out of your professional day to give one of our wellness programs a try. This is a great opportunity to sample some of the classes that Well Aware hosts throughout the year, as well as prioritize your health and wellness. **See the class schedule, links, and class descriptions.**

Wellbeats Is for All!

MCPS staff has free access to Wellbeats! Wellbeats offers a 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 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**.

This October, Wellbeats is challenging you to strengthen your mind and body. Increasing evidence suggests that the ability to connect your thoughts to your body can greatly impact your mental and physical wellness. What we think can impact how we feel. Here are five ways to take better care of yourself and strengthen your mind-body connection:

- **Regular Exercise.** Engage in physical activities you enjoy, such as going for a walk, jogging, lifting weights, or any other form of exercise.
- **Mindful Movement.** Practice activities that focus on body awareness, such as yoga, Pilates, or tai chi.
- **Meditation.** Try guided meditations to improve your mood and reduce stress.
- **Healthy Nutrition.** Nourish your body with plenty of fruits, vegetables, whole grains, and lean proteins.
- **Adequate Sleep.** Prioritize getting enough quality sleep each night to restore your body and mind.

Visit your Wellbeats wellness account to find more ways to improve the mind-body connection. Wellbeats Wellness is your complimentary virtual wellness offering with 1,200+ expert-led, on-demand fitness, nutrition, and mindfulness classes for all ages, levels, abilities, and interests. **See the attached flyer** for links to the mind/body connection videos.

HFP Live Now Available to MCPS Employees

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.

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 @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 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; 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**.