

April Well Aware eNews

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

- this month's wellness champion, a bus operator who joined the Department of Transportation's Biggest Loser challenge prior to the pandemic, later picked up a Fitbit to track his fitness progress, and made significant improvements in his health;
- a webinar on how stress can affect musculoskeletal health and stress management tools to improve your physical well-being;
- staff progress in the *Fountain of Youth* physical activity challenge;
- National Cancer Control Month;
- the American Heart Association's Move More Month;
- National Walking Day;
- ways to stress less this spring; and
- more!



Don't Miss It

This month's free webinar—Stress and Musculoskeletal Disorders

This webinar takes a closer look at the connection between stress and musculoskeletal health. Being aware of how stress can affect one's body is vital in taking steps towards greater physical wellness and to deter chronic aches and pains. Stress management tools and self-care strategies that can positively impact physical wellbeing will be discussed.

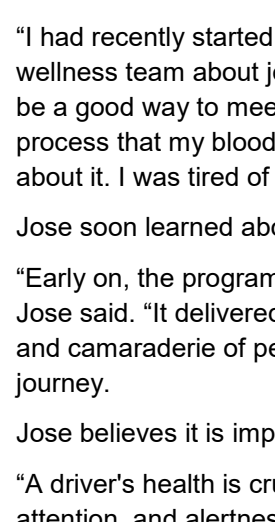
Wednesday April 27, 2022
4:30–5:30 p.m.

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 Champion Improves His Health Through Exercise, Improved Nutrition, and His Coworkers' Support



Mr. Jose L. Gonzalez, bus operator, Bethesda Transportation Depot

Jose L. Gonzalez, bus operator with the Bethesda Transportation Depot, got involved with the Department of Transportation (DOT) wellness program just prior to the Covid-19 shutdown. He

joined and was quite successful in the department's Biggest Loser challenge. Recently, Jose picked up a Fitbit to track his fitness progress and has made significant improvements in his health.

Jose's health and wellness journey became a priority as a new MCPS employee.

"I had recently started working at MCPS and saw a post from Mary Joseph and the wellness team about joining my coworkers for some exercise," Jose said. I thought it would be a good way to meet my coworkers. I had also been informed during the DOT exam process that my blood pressure was beginning to trend high, and I wanted to do something about it. I was tired of being tired all the time."

Jose soon learned about and joined the DOT wellness program.

"Early on, the program provided very strong fundamentals that I continue to use every day," Jose said. "It delivered on the promise that getting healthy can be fun. The encouragement and camaraderie of people working towards similar goals really jump started my health journey.

Jose believes it is important for transportation staff to live healthy lives.

"A driver's health is crucial to performance," Jose said. "Reliability, good reflexes, keen attention, and alertness are all the byproducts of a healthy lifestyle."

He also recognizes the positive influence his wellness efforts have had on his family.

"My entire family has benefited," Jose said. "I lost 50 pounds and have kept it off, and we have become considerably more aware of our well-being."

What is next for Jose?

"Now my goal is to simply stay the course, continue to work hard, and have a good time doing it," Jose said. "I want to focus on continuing to improve circulation, as this can become an issue for drivers."

Jose has advice for coworkers who are considering a health and wellness journey.

"Take advantage of the resources available and don't do it alone," he said. "As much as this is a solitary pursuit, it is a team effort. Just show up and commit to a better version of you. While it may sound corny, it is absolutely true that consistency carves canyons!"

Jose wants to thank Mary L. Joseph, DOT's wellness coach, Nicolette R. Daniels, bus operator and wellness coach, and the rest of the DOT team for their support.

"Mary is the personification of a positive mental attitude," Jose said. "Ms. Nicolette's energy is infectious and the rest of the crew continues to have such a great impact on me."

Wellness Initiatives: An Alternative to Biometric Health Screening Available Now

An alternative way to complete the Wellness Initiatives biometric health screening is available again this year for MCPS employees who wish to reduce their 2023 health insurance premiums.

Due to COVID-19, Well Aware has been unable to hold onsite biometric health screenings. For that reason, MCPS employees now are able to register for and complete *Biometrics Incentive Alternative 2023 Benefit Year* training (course number 90899) on **Professional Development Online (PDO)**, in lieu of a biometric health screening. Employees who complete the training by **October 7, 2022**, will pay 1 percent less of the total cost of their 2023 health insurance.

Employees who are able to complete their yearly physical with their doctor (or at a MinuteClinic for CareFirst members) also have until **Friday, October 7, 2022**, to complete the physical and receive the discount.

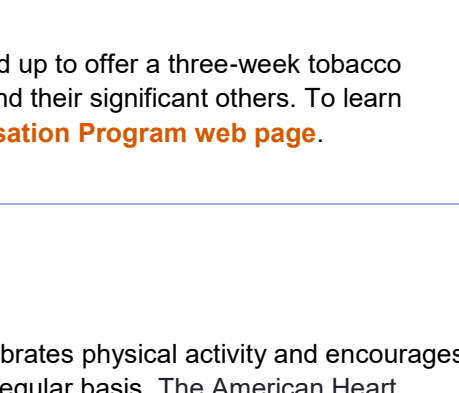
The Wellness Initiatives program provides employees covered by an MCPS-provided medical insurance plan with incentives to reduce their health insurance costs. By completing steps 1 and 2 below, your contribution to your health insurance will be reduced by 2 percent. Be sure to take advantage of the rate reductions by—

1. **Completing a biometric health screening OR its alternative by October 7, 2022.** See your doctor for an annual physical (or, if you are a CareFirst member, have your physical at a CVS Minute Clinic), **OR** register for and complete the *Biometrics Incentive Alternative* training. If you do, you will pay 1 percent less of your health insurance costs in 2023.
2. **Completing the health risk assessment on your medical plan's website by October 7, 2022** to pay 1 percent less of your health insurance costs. This is the *Real Age Test* for **CareFirst**, and the *Total Health Assessment* for **Kaiser Permanente**.

Kaiser Permanente and CareFirst members: Be sure to log in to your medical plan's web page to consent to your participation in the program. Without your consent, your information will not be reported.

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

MCPS Fountain of Youth Challenge Is Underway!



We are two weeks into the MCPS *Fountain of Youth* physical activity challenge and MCPS staff members are working hard! Ten individual prizes, a grant for schools/offices/depots for logging activity, already have been awarded. We seem to have the spring back in our steps!

It is not too late to join! Register now for a **Well Aware Fitness Log** account and start logging your activity. **See all of the details** on the MCPS Fountain of Youth challenge web page.

April Is National Cancer Control Month

This year, an estimated half million Americans will lose their lives to cancer, and three times that many will be diagnosed with this devastating illness. Cancer patients are parents and grandparents, children and cherished friends. This disease touches almost all of us and casts a shadow over families and communities across our nation.

During National Cancer Control Month this April, we remember those we have lost, support Americans fighting this disease, and recommit to progress toward effective cancer control.

Prevention and screening are our best defenses against cancer. All Americans can reduce their risk by eating a healthy diet, exercising regularly, limiting sun exposure, avoiding excessive alcohol consumption, and living tobacco-free. Individuals should also take advantage of appropriate, regularly scheduled cancer screenings. **Learn more** about screenings for many types of cancers.

We Want to Help You Quit for Good



The U.S. Surgeon General has said, "Smoking cessation [stopping smoking] represents the single most important step that smokers can take to enhance the length and quality of their lives."

It's hard to quit smoking, but you can do it. To have the best chance of quitting and remaining a nonsmoker, you need to know what you're up against, what your options are, and where to go for help. We can help!

Well Aware and Kaiser Permanente have teamed up to offer a three-week tobacco cessation class, *Quit for Good*, for MCPS staff and their significant others. To learn more about the program, visit the **Tobacco Cessation Program web page**.

It is Move More Month

Every April, the American Heart Association celebrates physical activity and encourages all Americans to commit to being more active on a regular basis. The American Heart Association encourages you to Move More Together with these **Five-Minute Movement Breaks!**

Are you fitting in at least 150 minutes (2.5 hours) of heart-pumping physical activity per week? If not, you're not alone. Only about one in five adults and teens get enough exercise to maintain good health. Being more active can help all people think, feel, and sleep better; and perform daily tasks more easily, and if you're sedentary, sitting less is a great place to start.

These recommendations are based on the Physical Activity Guidelines for Americans, 2nd edition, published by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, **Office of Disease Prevention and Health Promotion**, and suggest how much physical activity we need to be healthy. The guidelines are based on current scientific evidence supporting the connections between physical activity, overall health and well-being, disease prevention and quality of life.

Adults should be getting at least 150 minutes per week of moderate-intensity aerobic activity, or 75 minutes per week of vigorous aerobic activity, or a combination of both, preferably spread throughout the week.

Children 3-5 years old should be physically active and have plenty of opportunities to move throughout the day. Kids 6-17 years old should get at least 60 minutes per day of moderate -to-vigorous-intensity physical activity, mostly aerobic.

If you are just getting started, remember that any amount of movement is better than none. Start by taking a two-minute walk and add to it!

This Year's National Walking Day Is April 6, 2022

The first Wednesday in April is National Walking Day. The American Heart Association (AHA) sponsors this day to remind people about the health benefits of taking a walk. Wear your sneakers to work—or take them with you—and take a 30-minute walk before or after your work day or during a break.

Did you know—

- Less than 48 percent of adults in the US get enough aerobic exercise to improve their health. That includes walking! Get outside and get that heart rate up!
- All it takes is 15 minutes of walking to actually curb a craving for chocolate or other sweet-related foods. Next time you are looking for something sweet, take a walk around the block.
- A study found that those who walked 20 minutes per day five days a week reported taking nearly 50 percent fewer sick days than those who exercised once per week or less!

As part of AHA's efforts to promote healthy living, National Walking Day was started in 2007. **Find out why walking is the most popular form of exercise.**

How will your school or office celebrate the event? **Email your stories and photos to ERSC.**

National Get Fit, Don't Sit Day: Wednesday, May 4, 2022

The first Wednesday in May is *Get Fit, Don't Sit Day*. The American Diabetes Association (ADA) sponsors this day to increase awareness of the dangers of excessive sitting, and the importance of getting up and moving throughout the day—especially at work.

Research shows that sitting for long periods of time increases the risk of health complications. The ADA recommends breaking up sitting time with three or more minutes of light physical activity, such as walking, leg extensions, or overhead arm stretches every 30 minutes.

Here are some great resources with ideas to get you moving:

- **More information on why sitting is bad for your health.**
- **Desk exercises**

Stress Less This Spring

Fresh air and exercise can help you manage stress. In addition, being in the outdoors and nature can improve mental well-being. Spring is a wonderful time to get outside and enjoy nature. **Check out this video for more information on how nature helps mental health.**

In addition to spending more time in nature, Well Aware is continuing our online, virtual, 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.

Online Physical Activity Classes for Spring

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 Well Aware's classes to see what kind of physical activity is best for you! From Zumba, to HIITCamp, Stretch and Mobility, Core, yoga, and toning, we offer many classes to meet your needs. **Email Well Aware** to request the monthly calendar of classes.

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 @mcpswellaware 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.

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.

Wellbeats Is Here!

MCPS staff now 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; you also can download classes to play when you are offline. See **this flyer** for log-in information, enjoy this **welcome video**, and this video announcing that **Wellbeats is for All. Get started today!**

Check Out Our Online Health and Wellness "Toolbox"

Well Aware, the MCPS employee wellness program, brings you the *Well Aware Wellness Toolbox*, a web page with many resources to help MCPS staff adjust to the return to schools and offices. 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!

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**.