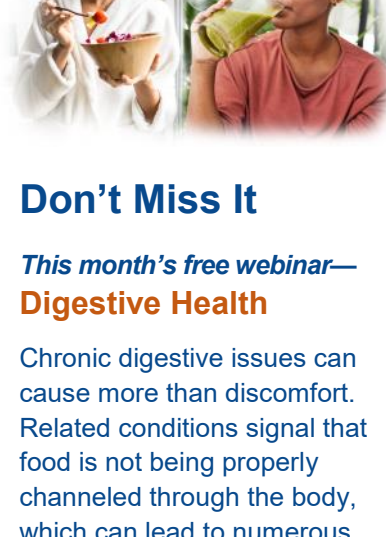


March Well Aware eNews

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

- this month's wellness champions, two high school teachers who teamed up to bring their coworkers some fun and educational wellness programs while teaching them the importance of self-care;
- a webinar on digestive health;
- this year's spring physical activity challenge;
- National Nutrition Month;
- Diabetes Alert Day;
- National Walking Day;
- how to prevent colorectal cancer;
- a 5k training program for the spring; and
- more!



Don't Miss It

**This month's free webinar—
Digestive Health**

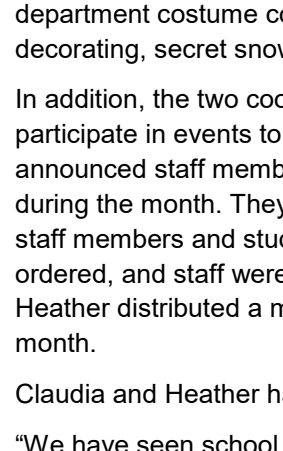
Chronic digestive issues can cause more than discomfort. Related conditions signal that food is not being properly channeled through the body, which can lead to numerous immediate and long-term health concerns. Learn how to eat for healthy and regular digestion.

Wednesday, March 20, 2024
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**.

Wellness Champions Promote Self-care by Hosting Wellness Programs at Their School



Mrs. Claudia Guay Wilks, classroom teacher, and Ms. Heather Giovenco, classroom teacher, Sherwood High School

l to r: Heather Giovenco, Claudia Guay Wilks

Classroom teachers Claudia Guay Wilks and Heather Giovenco have teamed up to bring some fun and educational wellness programs to the staff at Sherwood High School. From movement and stress management classes to financial education workshops, the school's employees are learning the importance of self-care.

Heather and Claudia believe that staff health and wellness programs are essential for high school staff.

"High school teachers make so many decisions on a daily basis and very few are about their own self-care," Heather said. "Having activities that boost personal health and wellness helps to increase job satisfaction and improve teachers' mental health. It also promotes an overall positive school culture."

Claudia and Heather are working very hard to bring great programs to their coworkers at Sherwood High School.

"This school year, we have held a staff event each month," Claudia said. "These events included financial wellness training, guided meditation, Zumba, joint workouts, and self-defense classes. We also have held staff bonding events and competitions, such as department costume contests, cookie exchanges, chili cook-offs, gingerbread house decorating, secret snowflake swaps, and sweet greets."

In addition, the two coordinated wellness week, during which students and staff got to participate in events to improve their wellness and focus on gratitude. Claudia and Heather announced staff members of the month, and a trophy was passed between staff members during the month. They formed a wellness committee, comprised of student-nominated staff members and students. To promote their goals, wellness committee T-shirts were ordered, and staff were encouraged to wear blue on Wellness Wednesdays. Claudia and Heather distributed a monthly newsletter with wellness tips and events they held that month.

Claudia and Heather have noticed many positive outcomes from their efforts.

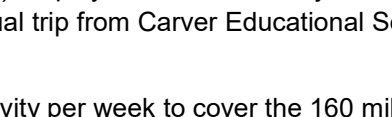
"We have seen school staff build relationships outside of their departments, which can be hard to do at the high school level," Heather said. "We have noticed students are more excited that staff members are participating in spirit weeks and other staff-student activities."

Claudia and Heather have advice for schools looking to start a staff wellness program.

"School wellness can be a huge undertaking, so start small," Claudia said. "Collaborate with your administration to determine your budget and get creative. MCPS Well Aware can be a great resource for bringing in free staff resources, and a dedicated committee is extremely helpful to gather helping hands!"

Well Aware and the Employee Assistance Program

Monthly Connection: National Nutrition 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

In recognition of National Nutrition Month, the EAP is highlighting resources that synergize the topics of nutrition and mental health. The Mediterranean diet is one of the most recommended eating plans by nutrition experts due to evidence in research showing benefits on healthy aging, cardiovascular health, and cancer. Research is emerging that shows the benefits of this eating pattern on mental health, particularly on depression and anxiety.

- [The Mediterranean Diet Pyramid](#)
- [American Heart Association overview of the Mediterranean diet](#)

National Eating Disorder Awareness Week 2024 is Monday, February 26—Sunday, March 3, 2024. This year's theme from the **National Eating Disorders Association** is *Get in the Know*. Eating disorders can impact people of all body sizes, and the way we talk about eating disorders matters. Learn more about eating disorders from the National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH) and the National Association of Anorexia Nervosa and Associated Disorders (ANAD). And remember, you can contact the EAP for support at 240-740-6500 (Monday–Friday from 8:30 a.m.–5:00 p.m.).

- [Eating Disorders: About More Than Food \(NIMH\)](#)
- [Eating Disorders: Common Warning Signs \(ANAD\)](#)

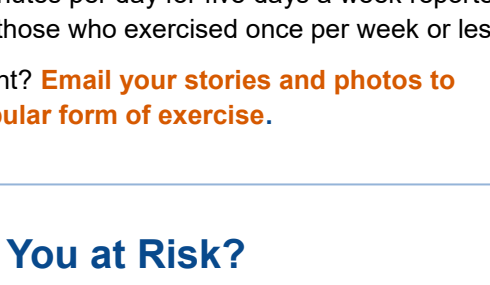
ANAD's Eating Disorder Helpline offers free support and referrals. Call 1-888-375-7767 (available Monday–Friday from 10:00 a.m.–10:00 p.m. ET).

Well Aware Resources

In addition to the National Nutrition Month resources in the article above, check out these additional resources from the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics.

- [Smart tips for Plant Based Eating](#)
- [Eating Right on a Budget](#)

Well Aware's Spring Physical Activity Challenge: Reach the Beach



As summer approaches, many employees long for time to relax on the beach. This spring, Montgomery County Public Schools (MCPS) employees are invited to join their colleagues, or travel solo, to *Reach the Beach* on a virtual trip from Carver Educational Services Center (CESC) to Ocean City, Maryland (OCMD).

To make the trip, complete five hours of activity per week to cover the 160 miles from Rockville to OCMD. Here's how: One mile will be equivalent to 15 minutes. By completing the equivalent of 20 miles of activity per week, you will reach the beach by the end of the eight-week challenge.

Remember to enter your physical activity time, which will translate into miles, into the online **Well Aware Fitness Log** to be entered into the weekly prize drawing. Increase your physical activity, connect socially with your coworkers, and win grant prize money. Registration began on Monday, March 4, 2024; the challenge begins on Monday, March 11, 2024.

Reach the Beach continues Well Aware's goal of building long-lasting exercise habits. Teams can work together to encourage members' activity, and support each other through this eight-week physical activity challenge.

Learn more about the *Reach the Beach* challenge by visiting the **Well Aware web page**, or simply search for *Reach the Beach wellness challenge* from any MCPS web page.

March Is National Nutrition Month

National Nutrition Month is a nutrition education and information campaign held each March by the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics, formerly the American Dietetic Association. The campaign focuses attention on the importance of making informed food choices and developing sound eating and physical activity habits.

The theme for the 2024 National Nutrition Month is *Beyond the Table*, which addresses the farm-to-fork aspect of nutrition, from food production and distribution to navigating grocery stores and farmers markets, and even home food safety and storage practices. It also describes the various ways we eat, not only around a dinner table but also on the go, in schools and restaurants, at games and events. This theme also includes sustainability (e.g., decreasing food waste at school and work to home and beyond).

- [Beyond the Table Tips](#)
- [Eating Right and Reducing Food Waste](#)
- [Healthy Eating on the Run: A Month of Tips](#)
- [Smart Tips for Successful Meals](#)

How will you celebrate National Nutrition Month? Get creative and send us a picture of how your school/office/depot chose to have a healthy celebration.

This Year's National Walking Day Is April 3, 2024

The first Wednesday in April is National Walking Day. Since 2007, the American Heart Association has sponsored this day to promote healthy living and 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. It takes 15 minutes of 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 for five days a week reported less than nearly 50 percent fewer sick days than those who exercised once per week or less.

How will your school or office celebrate the event? **Email your stories and photos to ERSC. Find out why walking is the most popular form of exercise.**

A Diabetes Wake-up Call: Are You at Risk?

One in three Americans is at risk for developing type 2 diabetes, a serious disease that can lead to complications such as kidney disease, blindness, and amputations. But type 2 diabetes doesn't have to be permanent; it can be prevented or delayed with healthy lifestyle modifications.

Be sure to participate in the American Diabetes Association Alert Day on March 26, 2024. Held the last Tuesday of March each year, is a one-day wake-up call asking Americans to take the Diabetes Risk Test to find out if they are at risk for developing type 2 diabetes. The Diabetes Risk Test asks users to answer simple questions about height, weight, age, family history, and other potential risk factors for prediabetes or type 2 diabetes. Preventive tips are provided for everyone who takes the test, including encouraging those at high risk to talk with their health care provider.

- [Take the Type 2 Diabetes Risk Test now!](#)
- [Learn risk factors for Type 2 Diabetes.](#)

Wellness Initiatives:

Get to Know Your Numbers

We live our lives by the numbers: phone numbers, PIN numbers, and our social security numbers.

But do you know the heart health numbers that could literally save your life? Healthy numbers mean a healthy heart. If you follow a healthy lifestyle—eat a balanced diet, get regular exercise, and avoid smoking—you can turn any bad numbers around.

You can learn about these vital health numbers and reduce your financial contribution to your health insurance by participating in Montgomery County Public Schools (MCPS) Wellness Initiatives program. To take full advantage of the program, complete a biometric health screening* and health risk assessment yearly.

To find out how to complete your biometric health screening and health risk assessment, please visit the **Wellness Initiatives web page**. See a **schedule of on-site biometric health screenings**.

Colorectal Cancer Can Be Prevented!

Colon cancer is the third most commonly diagnosed cancer and the second leading cause of cancer death in men and women combined in the United States. The American Cancer Society estimates that this year 95,520 people will be diagnosed with colon cancer, 39,910 will be diagnosed with rectal cancer, and 50,260 will die from this disease.

On average, the lifetime risk of developing colon cancer is about one in 23 for men and women combined (4.5 percent). This varies widely according to individual risk factors, however.

Physicians from the American College of Gastroenterology want you to know that a screening colonoscopy can find growths in the colon called polyps so they can be removed before they turn into colorectal cancer.

With regular screening, colon cancer can be found early, when treatment is most effective. In many cases, screening can **prevent colon cancer** by finding and removing polyps before they become cancer. And if cancer is present, earlier detection means a chance at a longer life. Generally, the more advanced colon cancer is at detection, the lower the five-year survival rates are.

Since the mid-1980s, the colon cancer survival rate has been increasing, due in part to increased awareness and screening. By finding polyps and cancer in the earlier stages, it is easiest to treat. Improved treatment options have also contributed to a rise in survival rates.

Learn more about colorectal screenings.

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.

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!**

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 are also 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.

Join Us Online 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 and mind, and help you manage your stress and overall wellness.

This spring, Well Aware is continuing our online live and recorded classes for your convenience. From Zumba and HIITCamp, to yoga and core workouts, 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 to stay up to date on class links, and updates. **Opt-in to this email distribution list.**

Stress Less This Spring

Are you under any stress? You are not alone. Stress not only affects you emotionally, but it also greatly impacts 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 spring, Well Aware is continuing our 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 a monthly calendar of classes. **Opt in** to our wellness email distribution list.

Spring 5k Training Program

Running is an accessible, inexpensive and effective way to improve your health and fitness, relieve stress, and boost your confidence. Whether you have never run or it's been a while since you last ran, spring is the perfect time to start training!

Following a successful fall session, the Run Farther & Faster MCPS Spring Virtual Group 5k Training Program will begin on Monday, April 8, 2024, and run through Saturday, June 15, 2024. Participants will receive a comprehensive 10-week training calendar, weekly emails with training support and running-related information, as well as the ability to email certified running coaches with questions or concerns. The training calendar begins with run/walk intervals and progress safely and gradually towards continuous running. It also includes strength workouts and form drills. For those who are interested, participants also have access to a private Facebook group to facilitate finding running partners.

This program is appropriate for new runners or runners who are returning after a hiatus. Space is limited to the first 50 registrants. **Register here by March 25, 2024**, and **learn more**.

Another Virtual Staff Wellness Day Is Planned

Save the Date! During the Professional Day on Wednesday, April 10, 2024, Well Aware, Healthier Generation, 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 to prioritize your health and wellness. Click here for the class schedule, links, and class descriptions. **Learn more**.

Omada for Cigna and Kaiser Permanente Members

Omada is a personalized program that helps members lose weight and create healthier habits by offering one-on-one personal coaching and the tools needed to make 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 omadahealth.com/mcps. Be sure to view this **two-minute video**.

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 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: mcpsmd.

Wellbeats Can Help You Get the Exercise You Need

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. 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**.

March is National Nutrition Month, and Wellbeats is pleased to share an opportunity to learn about how food can play an important role in all areas of our health—the Supportive Foods program on Wellbeats Delicious! In this mini-series, you will explore a variety of supportive foods, discover wonderful and nourishing meal ideas, and access downloadable recipes for you to try at home.

What's included—

- a deep dive into supportive foods for improved digestion and metabolism, enhanced energy levels, stress relief, better sleep, and healthy skin;
- meal and snack ideas to incorporate supportive foods into your day; and
- healthy recipes to fuel your wellbeing.

In your Wellbeats Wellness account, go to **Programs** to join the Supportive Foods program today. Check out the attached **flyer**, and **program calendar**.

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**.