

April Well Aware eNews

Welcome to the April 2021 issue of the *Well Aware eNews!* Read on to learn about—

- this month's wellness champion, a bus operator who knew from the start of her MCPS career that she would take advantage of the school system's wellness program;
- a webinar on sugar, sugar substitutes, and sodium and how to reduce sugar and sodium intake;
- an update on the *Mind-Body Reboot* challenge;
- National Cancer Control Month;
- the American Heart Association's Move More Month;
- National Get Fit Don't Sit Day; and
- more!



Don't Miss It

This month's free webinar—**The Truth About Sweeteners, Sugar Replacers, and Sodium in Foods**

Join this webinar to get a better understanding of the basics of sugar, sugar substitutes, and sodium. Learn ways to reduce sugar and sodium intake.

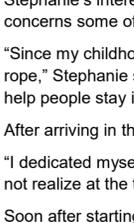
Wednesday, April 28, 2021
4:00–5:00 p.m.

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 Recommits to Making Her Own and Others' Health a Priority



Stephanie Jimenez Cortes, bus operator I, Clarksburg Transportation Depot

The day she was hired, Stephanie Jimenez Cortes told Department of Transportation Safety/Training Unit staff that she was very interested in the MCPS wellness program. Not long after, she put her interest into practice. For six years, Stephanie, a bus operator I with the Clarksburg Depot, has been teaching Zumba and CPR classes to transportation department staff.

Stephanie's interest in her health began at an early age. She hoped to avoid the weight concerns some of her family members had experienced.

"Since my childhood I have enjoyed playing outdoors, dancing, riding a bicycle, and jumping rope," Stephanie said. "I even graduated with a college degree in that profession. I love to help people stay in shape in easy, inexpensive, and fun ways."

After arriving in the United States 16 years ago, Stephanie took on additional priorities.

"I dedicated myself to taking care of my children and my home," Stephanie said. "What I did not realize at the time was that I was neglecting myself. I gained more than 70 pounds."

Soon after starting her job with MCPS, Stephanie heard about Well Aware's classes that are a free benefit to employees. She decided to reprioritize her health and wellness.

"I met Mary, the Transportation department's wellness specialist," Stephanie said. "I said to her, 'Wow! I'm going to work hard for a year to recover my physical condition.'"

And she has. So far, Stephanie has lost 48 pounds. Her enjoyment of physical activity helped set her on the path to health and wellness. She then began pursuing opportunities to encourage others to do the same.

"From an early age I promised myself that I would become a specialist in promoting health," Stephanie said. "After that first year of getting myself back in shape, I asked Mary to give me the opportunity to do what I love so much, teach exercise and dance classes. This is how I regained my health and my confidence."

Stephanie offers advice to those who are ready to begin their health and wellness journey.

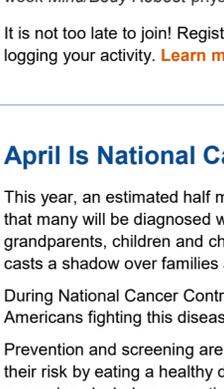
First are two mottos that guide Stephanie on her health and wellness journey. The first is, "Our greatest wealth is our health," the second is "There is something for everyone."

With that, she reminds us of the opportunities available to us through the MCPS wellness program.

"MCPS and Well Aware provide us with different opportunities to learn to take care of ourselves," Stephanie said. "There are classes to learn how to dance, cook healthy foods, and manage diabetes. Now MCPS has *BurnAlong*. Start by walking or join a softball team. There are so many classes on demand and completely at our disposal."

What it comes down to, according to Stephanie, is the choices we make ... or don't make.

"It is never too late to begin and you don't have to spend a lot of money to be healthy," Stephanie said. The only thing that keep you from starting is your own decision not to."



Well Aware: There Still Is Time to Join the *Mind/Body Reboot!*

We are three weeks into the *Mind/Body Reboot* challenge and MCPS staff members are working hard! Fifteen participants already have received individual prizes for logging their physical activity: grants for their school/office/depot. We seem to have the spring back in our steps!

Like computer systems that need an occasional reboot, our physical and mental systems can benefit from rebooting as well. We've all been under a lot of stress due to the pandemic. Create new healthy behaviors to reboot your mind and body by joining Well Aware's 10-week *Mind/Body Reboot* physical activity challenge.

It is not too late to join! Register for an online **Well Aware Fitness Log** account and start logging your activity. **Learn more** about the *Mind/Body Reboot* challenge.

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.

Wellness Initiatives: Lower Your Health Insurance Contributions

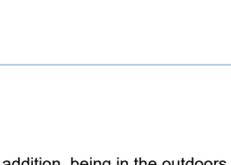
If you are covered by an MCPS-provided medical insurance plan through CareFirst or Kaiser Permanente, you can learn more about your health and reduce your contributions to your 2022 health insurance with the Wellness Initiatives program. To take full advantage of these rate reductions, complete a biometric health screening and a health risk assessment yearly.

The Wellness Initiatives are very simple. In order to earn the maximum 2% incentive toward your medical premium, you will need to complete:

- An annual health assessment online
- An annual biometric health screening

To learn more about how to complete these steps and how your completion of them will be reported to MCPS, please visit the **MCPS Wellness Initiatives for Employees Web Page**.

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 is 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 *Quit for Good*, a tobacco cessation class for MCPS staff and significant others, held via three one-hour weekly webinars. To register for an upcoming session of *Quit for Good*, **email Well Aware**.

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.

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!

National Get Fit, Don't Sit Day: Wednesday, May 5, 2021

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:

- **Don't Sit, Get Fit! video**
- **Stretches to Do at Work Every Day**

Stress Less This Spring

Fresh air and exercise can help you to manage stress. In addition, being in the outdoors and nature can improve mental wellbeing. 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 offers many classes virtually to help you learn tools to manage stress. From Mindfulness and Meditation, to Yoga, Stretch and Mobility, and Pilates, you are sure to find something that will meet your individual needs. **Email Well Aware** to request a monthly schedule of classes.

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 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.

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.

Be Well 365 for Staff

MCPS has launched 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. This has been a challenging time for all of us, and MCPS is committed to ensuring that its staff members stay safe and feel supported. **Browse Be Well 365**.

BurnAlong Classes Available to Help You and Your Family Stay Well and Fit

MCPS and CareFirst have partnered to give you access to *BurnAlong*, a health and wellness platform that comes with four free accounts for you and interested family and friends. The 1000+ classes available range from meditation, boxing, yoga, bootcamp, and spin. There are even classes on nutrition and financial literacy and specialized senior classes for you or older members of your family who may need physical activity but need to remain in the house. Classes can also be taken as a group, so you can work out with a friend or family member while seeing and talking to each other during the class. **Register and log in**.

Did you miss the introductory webinar for *BurnAlong*? **Watch the webinar** now and learn about all of the exciting features the platform offers.

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**.