

## December Well Aware eNews

Welcome to the December 2020 issue of the *Well Aware eNews*! Read on to learn about—

- this month's wellness champion, a paraeducator who adopted a plant-based diet to meet her wellness goals;
- a webinar on the basic functions of the musculoskeletal system, risks of injury in the home office and ways to prevent them, and simple exercises to alleviate common aches and pains;
- how you can stress less over the holidays;
- the importance of physical activity;
- the Flights to Fitness program;
- a cooking demonstration on healthy alternatives to holiday favorites; and
- more!



### Don't Miss It

#### This month's free webinar— **Preventing Home Office Injury and Conquering Aches and Pains**

Join us for a webinar to learn about the basic functions of the musculoskeletal system, risks of injury in the home office and ways to prevent them, and simple exercises to alleviate common aches and pains.

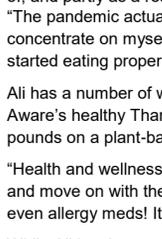
**Tuesday, December 15, 2020**  
4:00–5:00 p.m.  
Webinar

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: CareFirst*

## Wellness Champion Adopts Plant-based Lifestyle to Meet Wellness Goals



**Alicia (Ali) M. Gaylord, special education paraeducator, Damascus High School**

This has been a challenging year for many. Alicia Gaylord, special education paraeducator at Damascus High School, saw an opportunity to meet the majority of her health and wellness goals in spite of, and partly as a result of, the pandemic.

"The pandemic actually helped me because, without the commute, I have more time to concentrate on myself," Ali said. "I started by focusing on walking my dog. Then I finally started eating properly and lost the extra weight I'd gained over the years."

Ali has a number of wellness goals, and she's well on her way to meeting them. During Well Aware's healthy Thanksgiving cooking demonstration, Ali shared that she lost more than 30 pounds on a plant-based diet.

"Health and wellness is important in my life because I want to live to see my kids grow-up and move on with their lives," Ali said. "I want to try to get off my blood pressure, arthritis, even allergy meds! It would be great if I could retire and travel too."

While Ali has been an active participant in Well Aware classes, it was a Netflix documentary that motivated her to pursue a plant-based diet.

"Just before the pandemic hit last March, my husband and I watched a Netflix documentary on a whole-food plant-based diet," Ali said. "We decided to try it, slowly! Once we finished our bad food and started this diet, we both started feeling and sleeping better, and I started losing weight! We're about 80 percent of the way to our goals! We may cheat now and again, but that is okay!"

Outside of sleeping better and feeling better, Ali now has more energy.

"I take the dog out to walk two to three times a day for two-mile walks around our neighborhood, and then I throw the ball with him in the back yard. Being healthier and eating properly helps everything, everyone, even the dog! I also brought out all of the clothes I had put away because I wasn't able to fit into them. Now I feel like I have a brand-new wardrobe!"

The Well Aware challenges and resulting camaraderie with her coworkers have helped keep Ali motivated. Even better, her team at Damascus High School is determined to win!

"Without my co-workers encouraging me to coach our team during the wellness challenges and having co-workers take part in them, I wouldn't have done any of it," Ali said.

"Encouraging the school staff to participate in the challenges helps me as well! Winning the challenges, receiving recognition for them, and contributing the money we win to the school's special needs PE class also are very motivating!"

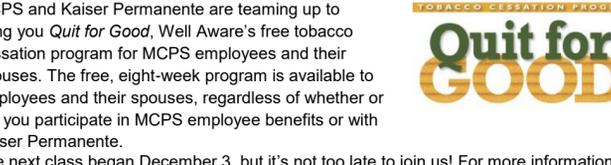
In addition to the challenges, Ali also is a dedicated participant in Well Aware webinars, cooking demonstrations, and other wellness programs. She believes Well Aware's programs have been a huge factor in her weight loss and fitness commitment.

For those getting started on their wellness journey, Ali has some suggestions.

"Try and adopt a plant-based lifestyle! Move your body, then keep moving! Do what you can to get yourself healthy! It will change your life."

Ali acknowledges she will have to shift again once COVID-19 is under control and our lives begin returning to normal.

"When we go back to work, it will be another adjustment," Ali said. "I have been working to keep myself on track, and it's hard at times. Still, it's been relatively easy for me to adjust to these healthy lifestyle changes. I'm sure I will adjust when we go back to work as well."



## Going the (Physical) Distance Relay Wraps Up; Prizes to Be Announced Next Week

Since September 28, 2020, MCPS employees have been working to reconnect and recommit to the goals they set during the *Going the (Physical) Distance Relay* physical activity challenge. Across MCPS, employees have enjoyed connecting online with coworkers through their involvement and are benefiting from improvements to their health.

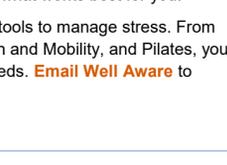
Although the challenge ends on December 6, 2020, our winter *Flights to Fitness* challenge will begin in January. You also may continue to use the online **Well Aware Fitness Log** to enter your daily activity, weight loss results, sleep details, and more.

*Going the (Physical) Distance Relay* grand prize winners will be announced in the December 9 issue of *The Bulletin*.

## It Is Always a Good Time to Quit!

MCPS and Kaiser Permanente are teaming up to bring you *Quit for Good*, Well Aware's free tobacco cessation program for MCPS employees and their spouses. The free, eight-week program is available to employees and their spouses, regardless of whether or not you participate in MCPS employee benefits or with Kaiser Permanente.

The next class began December 3, but it's not too late to join us! For more information on the *Quit for Good* tobacco cessation program, visit the **Quit for Good web page**. **E-mail Well Aware** to reserve your spot in the class or for information on future classes.



## Take the [Wellness] Initiative Save on Your Health Insurance in 2022

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 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 easy to complete. To earn the maximum two percent incentive toward your health insurance premiums, you need to complete a yearly—

- online health risk assessment, and
- biometric health screening (a physical with your primary care physician).

To find out how and when to complete your assessment and screening, more about the benefits of participating, and how your participation is reported to MCPS, please visit the **Wellness Initiatives for Employees web page**.

## Stress Less This Fall

The holiday season is typically a happy, yet stressful time. COVID-19 is making the season that much more challenging.

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.

Well Aware offers many classes virtually to help you learn tools to manage stress. From Mindfulness and Meditation, to Seated Yoga, 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 Fall

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. From Zumba to HIIT camp to Stretch and Mobility, Core workouts, Yoga, and toning classes, we offer many classes to meet your needs.

**Email Well Aware** for a monthly calendar of classes.

## Holiday Wellness

Make the most wonderful time of year a safe and healthy time of year. With just a little preparation and caution, your holidays can be remembered for all the good reasons. Here are some tips on staying healthy, safe and stress free.

- Don't skimp on sleep while getting ready for the holidays. Lack of sleep leads to—
  - ◊ overeating and weight gain;
  - ◊ safety hazards at home, work, and on the road; and
  - ◊ a negative mood.
- Keep your immune system strong by staying physically active, eating healthy, and limiting alcohol. You don't have to say no to all of the holiday treats, just don't overindulge.

- Get the flu vaccine.

Are you concerned that this holiday season will look different due to the pandemic? **Read this article** from the Cleveland Clinic on how to cope with holiday gatherings during this difficult time.



## Flights to Fitness to Return in January

Flights to Fitness (F2F) is a program designed to encourage physical activity MCPS employees through stair climbing. Stay tuned for more information on the latest *Flights to Fitness* challenge starting in January!

## Share Your Wellness Stories with Us and Encourage Your Coworkers Via 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 **@mcpowellaware** 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.

## Cooking Demonstration: Make Your Holiday Meals Healthier This Year

Join Well Aware for a cooking demonstration on Zoom to learn how to make healthy alternatives to holiday favorites.

Zoom Cooking Demonstration  
Wednesday, December 16, 2020  
4:30 p.m.

**Email Well Aware** to request Zoom sign-in details and a list of recipes and ingredients.

## BurnAlong

CareFirst and Well Aware are excited to bring you BurnAlong, an online health, wellness, fitness, and social motivation video platform. BurnAlong partners with hundreds of wellness experts from around the country to develop relatable and diverse programming. The program has thousands of live and on-demand classes in more than 45 wellness categories, including yoga, cardio, mindfulness, nutrition, prenatal, diabetes, adaptive workouts, and more.

BurnAlong will be available on January 1, 2021. For more information, **email Well Aware**.