

May Well Aware eNews

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

- this month's wellness champion, a physical education teacher who motivates her coworkers—virtually—to live healthy lives;
- a webinar on the ways we unintentionally sabotage our diets and the importance of making choices that lessen the frustration of healthy eating to keep us on track to losing weight;
- an update on the *Fountain of Youth* physical activity challenge;
- National High Blood Pressure Education Month;
- how you can access Wellbeats;
- National Get Fit Don't Sit Day;
- Mental Health Awareness Month; and
- more!



Don't Miss It

This month's free webinar—Why Your Diet May Not Be Working

Did you know eating fat-free products may work against you and your diet plan? This session takes a look at the ways we unintentionally sabotage our weight-loss diets. Learn how to make choices that lessen the frustration of healthy eating and keep you on track to losing weight.

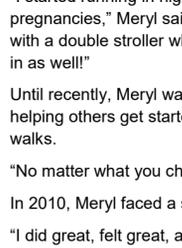
Thursday, May 19, 2022
4:30–5:30 p.m.

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 Motivates Her Coworkers—Virtually—to Live Healthy Lives!



Mrs. Meryl S. Ludwig, physical education teacher, Virtual Academy—Elementary School

Meryl Ludwig, physical education teacher at the Virtual Academy, has taken on the challenge of motivating her coworkers to live healthy lives. She has created much excitement around Well Aware's spring physical activity challenge, *Fountain of Youth*. She has been working hard to motivate them to participate, and she's doing it all ... virtually!

Health and wellness have always been a part of Meryl's life.

"I started running in high school, and never stopped, except briefly during my three pregnancies," Meryl said. "I ran pushing my daughter in a jogging stroller and then later with a double stroller when my two sons came along. I usually had one or two labs joining in as well!"

Until recently, Meryl was very involved in the running and racing community and enjoyed helping others get started and reach their goals. Now she primarily swims, bikes, and walks.

"No matter what you choose, the main thing is to keep moving," Meryl said.

In 2010, Meryl faced a significant challenge after running the Marine Corps Marathon.

"I did great, felt great, and easily qualified for the Boston [Marathon]," Meryl said. "Six days later, I could barely stand up. Many tests later, I was diagnosed with a very bad case of Lyme Disease."

She endured several years of treatment and, at times, was not doing well at all. Based on her test results, according to her doctor, she should have been incapacitated.

"Instead, my doctor said running saved my life," Meryl said. "Being in shape not only helps prevent illness and disease, it also helps us better handle symptoms when illness does occur."

Meryl believes that health and wellness should be a priority for school staff.

"We spend so much time helping others, that we often neglect to take care of ourselves," she said. The better we feel, the more productive we can be in our jobs. Virtual staff need to be especially mindful, as we spend a lot of time sitting, often in very close proximity to our refrigerators and pantries. It is easy to fall into the habit of wearing sweatpants and snacking throughout the day. Getting fresh air and going for runs, walks, or some other type of exercise is so important. It truly is the best antidepressant out there!"

While organizing a team can be tricky, Meryl has had to motivate her coworkers virtually, adding an extra layer of complexity. Still, she enjoyed it.

"Setting up the *MVA Miracle Milers* has been fun," Meryl said. "We quickly filled up a team roster, and it has helped me to meet other people in our program. After Spring Break, I have several other things planned, including sharing a *Couch to 5K* program, providing guest passes to local gyms that offer teacher discounts, and promoting all the wonderful parks, lakes, and other free resources available locally to get everyone up, out, and moving."

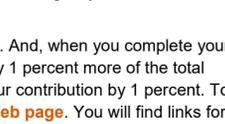
Meryl has some great advice for those all staff who are either working virtually, or who are struggling to find time for exercise.

"We are all busy, but there is always time," Meryl said. "Even doing 10 minutes of something several times throughout the day is great! It will quickly become a habit—a good habit! Kids need movement breaks, but adults do as well. Better yet, participate in movement breaks with the students. They will love it, and you probably will as well."

It is obvious that Meryl loves it.

"I tell my students all the time that I have the best job in the world, because, as a PE teacher, I get to spend my day dancing, jumping, and moving and grooving with them!" she said.

You Can 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](#).

Wellness Initiatives: Complete Your Health Risk Assessment to Save on Your Health Insurance Premiums

Completing your health risk assessment each year gives you the information you need to take better control of your health and well-being. And that's important, because when you are running at 100 percent, being fit and in good spirits will go a long way to help you perform at your best.

Take your medical insurance plan's confidential, online questionnaire and in less than 20 minutes, you will—

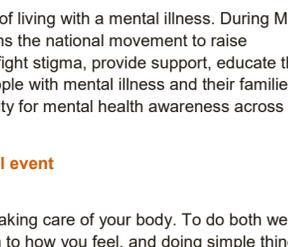
- learn your risk levels for common health problems, including heart disease, colon cancer, and diabetes;
- get a clear picture of your current health status and learn how to improve your health in the future through preventive tests, chronic condition support, and online health coaching; and
- discover interactive tools and educational information that can give you more details on our health status.

Managing and improving your health has never been easier. And, when you complete your Health Risk Assessment by October 7, 2022, MCPS will pay 1 percent more of the total cost of your 2023 health insurance premiums—reducing your contribution by 1 percent. To get started, visit the [Wellness Initiatives for Employees web page](#). You will find links for accessing the CareFirst and Kaiser Permanente Health Risk Assessments. You will also find helpful instructions to guide you through the log-in process.

[Learn more](#) about how you can reduce your health insurance costs in 2023 and beyond through the Wellness Initiatives program.

Have You Visited the Fountain of Youth?

Across Montgomery County Public Schools (MCPS), employees are experiencing better health and morale because of their involvement in Well Aware's *Fountain of Youth* physical activity challenge. Some are participating as individuals; others as members of a team. They are enjoying better health and fitness as a result.



There is still time to join the challenge. Let the *Fountain of Youth* challenge inspire you to become your most active self. Participate to regain your health and win prizes! Simply enter your activity in the online [Well Aware Fitness Log](#) by noon on Monday, May 23, 2022.

[Learn more](#) about the *Fountain of Youth* challenge.

Stay tuned

Grand prize winners will be announced in the May 25th issue of *The Bulletin*.

Spirit Award

Do you have a coworker who has gone above and beyond to help build a culture of wellness in your school or office? We are recognizing the MCPS employees who most encouraged others to live their healthiest lives. Ten Spirit Award winners will each receive a Zumba or Yoga class to be held at their school or office this fall. To request a Spirit Award nomination form, [email Well Aware](#). Nominations are due by close of business on Monday, May 23, 2022.

Don't stop now!

Maintain your active lifestyle and look for information about our fall wellness programs on the [Well Aware web page](#), in the [Well Aware eNews](#), on Twitter @mcpswellaware, and in [The Bulletin](#).

May Is National High Blood Pressure Education Month

Uncontrolled high blood pressure, or hypertension, is dangerous and far too common. In fact, one of every three adults in the United States has the condition. High blood pressure usually has no signs or symptoms, but it does have consequences. The only way to know if you are at risk for high blood pressure is to know your numbers.

During National High Blood Pressure Education Month, the National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute (NHLBI) is challenging Americans to control or lower high blood pressure. Your doctor may recommend that you adopt heart-healthy lifestyle changes, such as heart-healthy eating patterns like the [DASH eating plan](#), alone or with medicines. Controlling or lowering blood pressure can also help prevent or delay high blood pressure complications, such as chronic kidney disease, heart attack, heart failure, stroke, and possibly vascular dementia.

High blood pressure control is a journey. There are small steps you can take every day to control high blood pressure and protect your heart. [Learn five ways to get started](#).

Uncontrolled high blood pressure is dangerous and far too common. Talk with your health care team about a management plan. [Use this helpful tool during your visit](#).

[Learn a deep breathing technique](#) to help control blood pressure at any time.

It is Mental Health Awareness Month

Each year, millions of Americans face the reality of living with a mental illness. During May, the National Alliance of Mental Illness (NAMI) joins the national movement to raise awareness about mental health. Each year they fight stigma, provide support, educate the public, and advocate for policies that support people with mental illness and their families. Join *NAMI Walks Your Way 2022* to show solidarity for mental health awareness across the country.

- [Learn about the Montgomery County local event](#)
- [Listen to tips for caregivers](#)

Taking care of your mind is just as important as taking care of your body. To do both well requires living a healthy lifestyle, paying attention to how you feel, and doing simple things to take care of yourself.

MCPS and its medical insurance partners have resources for physical and mental health needs. Both medical plans also offer video visits, which make mental health care more accessible. Whether you are a member of CareFirst or Kaiser Permanente, Well Aware has compiled a list of [many resources available to you](#).

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 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 #mcpsstaffwellness for tweets!

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!