

March Well Aware eNews

Welcome to the March 2025 issue of *Well Aware eNews!* Read on to learn about—

- this month's wellness champions, administrators at a middle school who recently implemented a focus on staff wellness through healthy smoothies, yoga, and mindfulness activities;
- a webinar on the importance of eating foods that promote optimal and consistent digestion, ensuring a healthy gut and improved overall well-being;
- the *Summit Seeker* physical activity challenge;
- National Nutrition Month;
- preventing colorectal cancer; and
- more!



Don't Miss It

This month's free webinar—

Heart Health: Trust Your Gut Health

Discover the importance of maintaining a diet that promotes optimal and consistent digestion. A well-functioning gut serves a greater purpose than just breaking down food. Your gut health plays a crucial role in supporting your immune system, regulating hormones, enhancing brain function, and much more. Take part in this webinar to gain valuable insights on how you can contribute to the healing of your gut and improve your overall well-being.

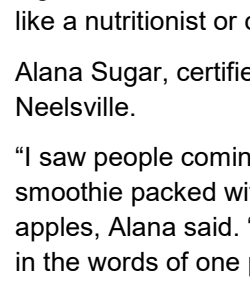
Wednesday, March 19, 2025
 Webinar/Recording
 4:30–5:30 p.m.

Please register for the webinar by emailing Well Aware. You will receive a link 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 Choose Wellness for Staff

Administration, Neelsville Middle School



From left, Madeline Hanington, staff development teacher, Neelsville Middle School, and Alana Sugar, certified nutritionist, Cigna

Neelsville Middle School administration recently implemented a focus on staff wellness at the school. At a recent staff wellness event, staff were invited to participate in a healthy smoothie demonstration and some simple midday yoga poses and mindfulness activities. Well Aware, in partnership with Cigna, sponsored these events to encourage the school's staff to adopt wellness practices into their lives.

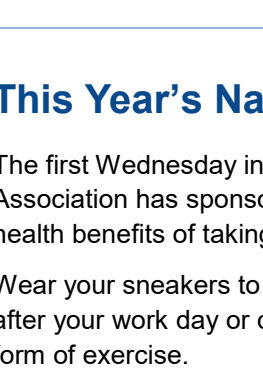
"Wow! The staff had a great time with the smoothies and yoga," Madeline Hanington, staff development teacher, said. "They were awesome!"

"Smoothies are such an easy way to add a midday boost of energy that also lifts staff morale," Lisa Cooperstein, wellness coordinator, said. "You can encourage staff to bring ingredients for the smoothies, have them share their favorite recipes, or bring in a resource like a nutritionist or chef to share their expertise."

Alana Sugar, certified nutritionist, shared her experience during the Smoothie Demo at Neelsville.

"I saw people coming together to enjoy relaxing conversation and a delicious nutritious smoothie packed with ginger—a natural anti-inflammatory—and fiber from fresh whole apples, Alana said. "Everyone enjoyed themselves and even the few who said they were, in the words of one person, "allergic to healthy food" were willing to try and enjoy it. Eating healthy doesn't have to be dreaded or shunned. Real food is fun, delicious, and easier to prepare than many people realize. It's the ideal way to build health."

Looking for an easy way to incorporate staff wellness into your day? Check out all of the available resources—including smoothie recipes, yoga recordings, and more—on the **Well Aware Toolbox page**.



A New Physical Activity Challenge for Spring: Summit Seeker

Whether it's literal or figurative, everyone has a mountain to climb. So, let's get after it together! Climbing any mountain in real life is quite the accomplishment, but climbing the equivalent distance is no easy feat, either.

MCPS Well Aware is challenging employees to embark on an eight-week journey of epic proportions by joining us for the *Summit Seeker* spring physical activity challenge. On this journey, we will be climbing to the top of Mount Everest! Instead of actually traveling to Nepal, we will complete the equivalent climb in cardiovascular, strength, and mindfulness activities.

As you complete an activity, be sure to enter your time, which will translate into miles, into the online **Well Aware Fitness Log**. If you do, you will be entered into the weekly prize drawing. Increase your physical activity, connect socially with your coworkers, and win grand prize money. Registration begins on Monday, March 10, 2025; the challenge begins on Monday, March 17, 2025.

Summit Seekers 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 physical activity challenge. Create healthy habits, and commit your time and energy to establish and maintain a regular fitness routine.

Learn more about the *Summit Seeker* challenge by visiting the **Well Aware web page**, or simply search for *Summit Seeker 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 2025 National Nutrition Month is *Food Connect Us*. Food is a connecting factor for many of us. Food connects us to our cultures, our families, and our friends. Sharing a meal is an opportunity to learn about its preparation, who made it, and where the ingredients were sourced. Health, memories, traditions, seasons, and access can all impact our relationship with food. While these factors influence the foods we eat, the foods we eat also affect our health.

- **Food Connects Us**
- **Nutrition Fact or Fiction**
- **Word Search**

This Year's National Walking Day Is April 2, 2025

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. Click **here** to see why walking is the most popular form of exercise.

How will your school/office/depot celebrate the event? **Email Well Aware** with your stories and pictures.

Diabetes Alert Day

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 25, 2025. 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.**

We hope you'll participate in the next American Diabetes Association Alert Day on Tuesday March 25, 2025.

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.

And as part of the MCPS Wellness Initiatives program, you can reduce your contributions to your medical insurance while learning about these vital numbers. To take full advantage of these incentives, complete a health risk assessment and a biometric health screening yearly.

Learn **more about the Wellness Initiatives program**, and review this **flyer**. See a **schedule of the on-site biometric health screenings**.

Colorectal Cancer: You Can Prevent It!

Colon cancer is the second leading cause of cancer death in men and women combined in the United States. Yet it is one of the few cancers that is preventable thanks to screening.

Here are two reasons why getting checked matters:

- Screening can find the warning signs of colon and rectal cancer, so doctors can act to prevent the disease.
- Screening can also find colorectal cancer 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.

As announced this week in the daily Staff Wellness email, Friday, March 7 is *Dress in Blue Day*. *Dress in Blue Day* lets allies everywhere join the mission to end colorectal cancer. By wearing blue, you bring awareness to colorectal cancer, support work being done to end it, and honor all those impacted by the disease.

Learn more about **colorectal screening**.

Well Aware Toolbox

Well Aware, the MCPS employee wellness program, brings you the Well Aware Wellness Toolbox, a web page with many resources to help staff live healthy and well lives. 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!**

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 also are 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 for Online Physical Activity

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, in-person, 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. **Opt in** to our wellness 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, in-person, 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

Following a successful fall session, the Run Farther & Faster MCPS Running Virtual Group 5K Training Program will begin on Sunday, April 6, 2025, and run through Saturday, June 14, 2025. As spring and warmer weather approach, benefit from the guidance of experienced and certified running coaches. Julie and Lisa of **Run Farther & Faster** will lead you through the 10-week spring running program.

The program includes a kick-off meeting, comprehensive training schedule tailored to both new and experienced runners, weekly communication from coaches with training tips and guidance, and race day preparation for those who would like to participate in a 5K race at the end of the program.

Race registration is an additional fee, but participants will have a discount code for the **Suds & Soles 5K** on Saturday, June 14th.

The program is *virtual* and can be followed from any location. Participants who have not run before, or who have taken a hiatus from running, will receive a training schedule targeted toward preparing participants to complete the 5K (3.1-mile) distance. Runners who are already running a minimum of 30 minutes three times per week can opt to follow a training plan that will prepare them to improve their 5K distance time by the end of the program.

Space is limited to the first 50 registrants. **Register** by April 1, 2025.

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**.

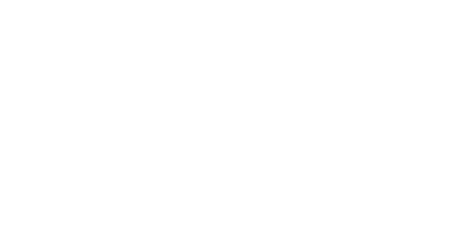
Have You Been to HFP Live?

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 with 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? Not to worry. Each livestreamed event is recorded and posted in a video library for you to access for at least 30 days. **Learn more**.

All MCPS staff can participate! **Log in** using password: mcpsmd.

Well Aware and the Employee Assistance Program Burnout



The Employee Assistance Program (EAP) and Well Aware (the MCPS Employee Wellness Program) continue to bring you monthly topics focusing on mental and physical health.

EAP Resources

Experiencing chronic stressors for long periods of time without meaningful breaks, rest, and support can lead to burnout. Burnout encompasses an emotional and physical exhaustion and can also include feelings of powerlessness, negativity, and decreased motivation or productivity.

If you notice signs of burnout in yourself, ways to recover include—

- **Connecting with others who support you.** This may include seeking support from a professional. Call the Employee Assistance Program (EAP) to schedule a no-cost, confidential appointment with a licensed mental health provider.
- **Making time for meaningful rest.** This includes taking breaks from stressors and practicing good sleep hygiene.
- **Taking good care of yourself.** Set boundaries, make time for movement and exercise, practice mindfulness, and prioritize time for joy.

Remember the MCPS EAP is here to support you! You can contact the EAP at 240-740-6500 (Monday–Friday from 8:30 a.m.–5:00 p.m.). Tune into this **recording** from the EAP to practice strategies on building your resilience.

Well Aware Resources

Our lives get busy as we deal with our various daily responsibilities, whether it's working, helping others, or taking care of our families. Sometimes, we get too busy and forget to take a step back and rest. That's when burnout can occur. Physical symptoms include chest pain, heart palpitations, gastrointestinal pain, dizziness, fainting, and/or headaches.

- **Burnout and Sleep**
Tip: Make time for restful sleep.
- **How Exercise Can Help with Burnout**
Tip: Try to get some physical activity in daily..
- **Nutrition and Stress: A Two-way Street**
Tip: Eat nutritious meals and stay hydrated.

Wellbeats Wellness: Simply Prepped Program

Do you want to enjoy healthier meals without the hassle of last-minute cooking? Meal prepping can help you embrace a healthier, more convenient lifestyle by allowing you to plan and prepare your meals in advance. This not only saves time and money but also reduces stress and helps you maintain a balanced diet.

As a part of your benefits, you have access to Wellbeats Wellness, which offers thousands of on-demand classes that can help you enjoy nutritious meals with ease, save time, and reduce stress in the kitchen.

Complete the *Simply Prepped* program by March 31, 2025 for a chance to win a Wellbeats Wellness accessories gift card!

Ready to start the *Simply Prepped* program? Access Wellbeats via the mobile app or on your internet browser and log in with your work email address. See Wellbeats **welcome flyer** for log-in instructions and the *Simply Prepped* program **calendar**.

Another Foam Roller Workshop to Be Held This Month

Have you ever heard of a foam roller?

Foam rollers relieve tension, stretch out sore muscles, and provide soothing self-massage. They're also ideal for improving core strength, flexibility, and balance. Save the date and join Well Aware for a workshop designed to identify foam rolling techniques and demonstrate how they can be used to improve circulation, tightness, and overall health.

Our instructor will talk you step-by-step through how to use the foam roller to reduce aches, pains, knots, and tension throughout your body. Both novices and existing foam roller users will benefit from and enjoy this session.

Learning How to Properly and Effectively Use a Foam Roller for Myofascial Release Saturday, March 22, 2025 12:30 p.m.

Email Well Aware to register.

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 240-740-8100 or **email Well Aware**.