

May Well Aware eNews

Welcome to the May 2023 issue of *Well Aware eNews!*
Read on to learn about—

- this month's wellness champion; a bus operator who has participated regularly in Well Aware's wellness activities since the program's inception;
- a webinar on taking care of our brains by getting physically active, managing our stress, and controlling our thoughts;
- *May on the Mat*, a physical activity challenge for the month;
- National High Blood Pressure Education Month;
- National Get Fit Don't Sit Month;
- Mental Health Awareness Month; and
- more!



Don't Miss It

This month's free webinar— Nourishment for Your Mind

Our brains play a role in every activity we do. In this webinar, we will explore how to take care of our brains by getting physically active, managing our stress, and taking control of our thoughts. .

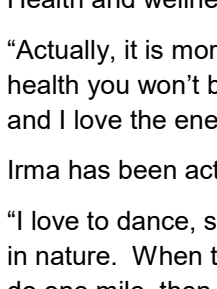
Thursday, May 18, 2023
4:30 p.m.–5:30 p.m.

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**.

Presented by: Kaiser Permanente

Wellness Champion Sparks Enthusiasm for Bus Depot's Wellness Program



Mrs. Irma Cockerille, bus operator, Clarksburg Transportation Depot

Irma Cockerille, bus operator with the Clarksburg Transportation Depot, has been an important catalyst for the depot's wellness program. Irma can often be seen walking between bus routes, or is the first to enter the room for an exercise class. She uses her excitement to motivate her coworkers to join wellness activities, announces depot wellness programs over the two-way radio, and posts upcoming programs on the wellness bulletin board.

Health and wellness is important to Irma for many reasons.

"Actually, it is more than important," Irma said. "It is vital because if you don't have good health you won't be able to perform basic daily tasks. Good health comes in many forms and I love the energy that I get from living a healthy lifestyle."

Irma has been active in Well Aware's wellness program from the start.

"I love to dance, so Zumba brings me joy through movement," Irma said. "I also love to walk in nature. When the weather is bad, I go to the gym. When I started walking, I could only do one mile, then two miles, and now I'm clocking four to five miles on my walks."

Irma believes that, as a bus operator, it is very important to be healthy and maintain a positive attitude.

"I transport children to and from school as a bus operator for special education students," Irma said. "They are under my care, so I need to be alert and focused when I get behind the wheel. I try to eat balanced meals and get a good night's sleep so I can be productive. Also, if you have good thoughts and a positive attitude, the children will pick up on it. I make sure I greet them cheerfully as they board the bus."

Irma says the Well Aware wellness program at the Clarksburg Depot has helped her to meet her goals.

"Mary Joseph, our wellness coach, is very encouraging," Irma said. "She and my coworkers always support me on my health journey by helping me stay on track. They suggest healthy eating tips, walk with me, and encourage me to participate in classes."

Irma acknowledges there have been days when she felt discouraged.

"My coworkers were there to help me get back on track," Irma said. Now I push myself to stay focused so I can reach my goals, and I am seeing the benefits of the work. I am now 25 pounds less, and I feel awesome!"

Irma has advice for other MCPS staff looking to start a health and wellness journey.

"Make the decision, and take that first step," Irma said. "It's a journey you will never regret; you will feel great once you see the results. There will be challenging days, but if you stay committed and stay on track, even if you fall off, you won't stay down, you will pick yourself up and keep moving forward."

Irma has another motivating message for MCPS staff.

"All Well Aware programs are FREE!" she said. "The classes are there to support you with education and healthy movement."

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 your health status.

Managing and improving your health has never been easier. And, when you complete your Health Risk Assessment by October 6, 2023, MCPS will pay 1 percent more of the total cost of your 2024 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 Cigna 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 2024 and beyond through the Wellness Initiatives program.

Join Well Aware for *May on the Mat*

If you have done any yoga recently, you are probably feeling more relaxed. Regardless of your level of yoga expertise, by practicing regularly, you can feel better from head to toe.

Yoga offers physical and mental health benefits for people of all ages. And, if you're going through an illness, recovering from surgery or living with a chronic condition, yoga can become an integral part of your treatment and potentially hasten healing.

Consider these yoga benefits:

- Improves strength, balance, and flexibility
- Helps relieve back pain, and ease arthritis
- Benefits heart health
- Improves sleep
- Increases energy and improves mood
- Helps manage stress
- Connects you with a supportive community

This month, Well Aware is challenging you to spend *May on the Mat*. Seek out and participate in two yoga classes per week, enter the activity into the **Well Aware Fitness Log**, and have a chance to win gift cards for participating.

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 their 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.

National Get Fit Don't Sit Day

Held the first Wednesday of May each year, National Get Fit Don't Sit Day is an opportunity for the American Diabetes Association (ADA) 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 resources with ideas to get you moving:

- **The risks of sitting too much**
- **Increase your NEAT (Non-Exercise Activity Thermogenesis)**

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. They fight stigma, provide support, educate the public, and advocate for policies that support people with mental illness and their families. Join NAMIWalks 2023 to show solidarity for mental health awareness across the country.

Learn more about the event, and review these mental health tips:

- **Information on Montgomery County's local event**
- **Mental health 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 to support your 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 Cigna or Kaiser Permanente, we have outlined many resources available to you. **Learn more**.

Teacher Appreciation Week: Resilience Building Workshops

Please join Well Aware and Kaiser Permanente in our virtual celebration of Teacher Appreciation Week! Join our 30-minute virtual workshops, which will provide a space for connection, regulation tools, and positive interactions that aid in resilience-building. The workshops will focus on these topics:

- **Joy and Gratitude**—Discover the impact joy and practicing gratitude has on overall health.
Tuesday, May 9
4:30 p.m.
- **Affirmations**—Identify your team's individual strengths and affirmations and positive self-talk.
Wednesday, May 10
4:30 p.m.
- **Awareness and Regulation**—Increase awareness and redefine stress as a manageable, natural function of the body.
Thursday, May 11
4:30 p.m.

Learn more.

Mindfulness Series

Join Well Aware for a workshop series on mindfulness. This workshop will provide knowledge and practice to create more wellness in your life both professionally and personally. The workshop will cover breathing, body scans, present-moment awareness, an eating meditation, and much more. **Learn more** and **email Well Aware** to register.

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 well-being. Spring is a wonderful time to get outside and enjoy nature. **See this article to learn more about how nature improves mental health**.

In addition to spending more time in nature, Well Aware is continuing its 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 more information.

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, your mind, and your overall wellness. Consider trying one of the classes below to see what kind of physical activity is best for you!

From Zumba and HIITCamp, to Stretch and Mobility, Core, yoga, and toning, we offer many classes to meet your needs. **Email Well Aware** to request the full schedule of classes.

Share Your Wellness Stories and Encourage Your Coworkers Through Twitter!

Well Aware is proud of MCPS employees 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** 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.

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 shop 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!

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**.