

## March Well Aware eNews

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

- this month's wellness champion, a middle school principal who has made staff wellness a priority this school year;
- a webinar on gut health where you will find out how to nurture a healthy gut microbiome;
- the *Fountain of Youth* physical activity challenge;
- National Nutrition Month;
- National Walking Day;
- Colorectal Cancer Awareness Month;
- the Run Farther and Faster MCPS Spring Virtual Group 5K Training Program; and
- more!



### Don't Miss It

#### This month's free webinar—Gut Health 101

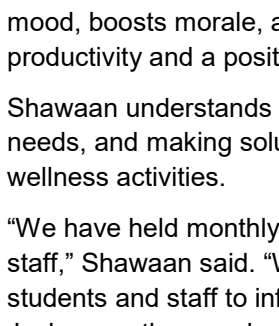
Scientists have found that gut health is directly linked to brain health. In this webinar, learn how to nurture a healthy microbiome through simple self-care techniques. You will also learn which foods will make your stomach feel great, improve your mood, and help your brain function at its best.

**Thursday, March 24, 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](#)

## Wellness Champion Creates Ways to Encourage and Recognize Staff Wellness Efforts



**Ms. Shawaan Robinson, principal, Briggs Chaney Middle School**

Ms. Shawaan Robinson, principal of Briggs Chaney Middle School, has gone above and beyond in planning events and opportunities this school year to recognize her staff and meet their wellness needs. From hand written notes, to therapy dogs, drum circles, art therapy, and more, This principal has come up with some very creative ways to encourage school employees' wellness and demonstrate her appreciation for their efforts.

"Staff wellness is so vital for school employees," Shawaan said. "It increases positive mood, boosts morale, and encourages comradery, which in turn leads to enhanced productivity and a positive workplace culture."

Shawaan understands the importance of listening to her employees, acknowledging their needs, and making solutions assessible. As a result, the staff is benefiting from a variety of wellness activities.

"We have held monthly spirit days, which are great for relationship building among the staff," Shawaan said. "We have created a Zen Den, a dedicated mindfulness space for students and staff to infuse a little calm into their day. We also have frequent visits from Jackson, a therapy dog, to specifically spend time with staff."

The principal and her staff are looking forward to their next staff wellness meeting at the end of February.

"We have devoted entire staff meetings to wellness activities including drum circles, art therapy, and more," Shawaan said.

She also makes her own health and wellness a priority.

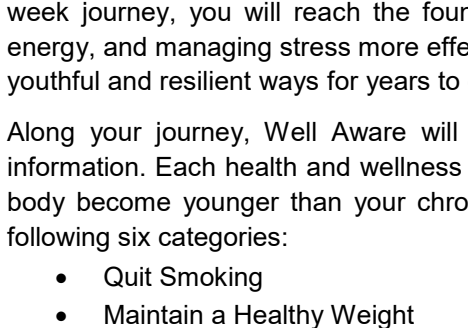
"Health and wellness allow me to be physically and mentally present and available to the students, staff, and the community that I am honored to serve," Shawaan said.

Shawaan has advice for school administrators who are looking for ideas to support their staff's health and wellness.

"Be intentional and make wellness a priority," Shawaan said. "It is also important to provide individualized time and attention to staff."

She also suggests seeking out some of the wellness resources already available to MCPS staff.

"From Well Aware, to the Employee Assistance Program, Restorative Justice teams, and MCPS Mindfulness teams, there are plenty of resources readily available to help give you the tools to jumpstart your staff wellness program," Shawaan said.



## A New Physical Activity Challenge for Spring: Fountain of Youth

The secret to staying youthful, vibrant, and healthy is not a pill. It is not a magic drink, lotion, or quick-fix. The actual fountain of youth are the choices you make each day. They are physical and mental habits you adopt to not only add more years to your life but more life to your years.

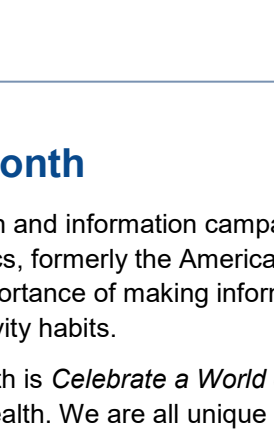
The treasure the map to this elusive fountain of youth leads to will take weeks of hard work to unveil and a lifetime of practice to achieve.

This spring, Well Aware is challenging you to take a 10-week journey to uncover the value and knowledge this treasure contains in the *Fountain of Youth* physical activity challenge. During the 10-week journey, you will *log at least 30 minutes* per day of activity while setting up healthy habits along the way. By the end of the 10-week journey, you will reach the fountain of youth feeling better, having more energy, and managing stress more effectively. You will be able to function in more youthful and resilient ways for years to come.

Along your journey, Well Aware will provide health and wellness educational information. Each health and wellness tip will be designed to help your mind and body become younger than your chronological age and will fall into one of the following six categories:

- Quit Smoking
- Maintain a Healthy Weight
- Stay Physically Active
- Eat an Anti-aging Diet
- Manage Stress
- Stay Social

Reaching the Fountain of Youth will be much easier if you have an accountability team to help you stay on track. Teams can work together and support each other to encourage healthy habits. Interested in taking the journey independently? That's fine too! Follow the hashtag #mcpstaffwellness on Twitter for challenge pictures, inspiration, and healthy tips.



Log at least 30 minutes of activity per day into the online [Well Aware Fitness Log](#) to be entered into the weekly prize drawing. Consider participating as part of a team to increase physical activity, connect socially with your coworkers, and win grant prize money. Registration begins on March 7, 2022; the challenge starts on Monday, March 14, 2022.

Learn more about the *Fountain of Youth* challenge by visiting the [Well Aware web page](#).

## 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!**

## March Is National Nutrition Month

National Nutrition Month is a nutrition education and information campaign held annually in March by the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics, formerly the American Dietetic Association. The campaign focuses on the importance of making informed food choices and developing sound eating and physical activity habits.

The theme for the 2022 National Nutrition Month is *Celebrate a World of Flavors*. There is no one-size-fits-all approach to nutrition and health. We are all unique with different bodies, goals, backgrounds, and tastes!

The Academy recommends balancing nutritious foods with physical activity most days of the week. According to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services' physical activity guidelines, adults should participate in at least 150 minutes of moderate-intensity aerobic physical activity per week.

Enjoy these tip sheets from the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics:

- [Celebrate a World of Flavors](#) (English)
- [Celebrate a World of Flavors](#) (Spanish)
- [20 Health Tips for 2022](#)
- [Nutrition Month Word Search](#)

How will you celebrate National Nutrition Month? Get creative and send us a picture of how your school/office/depot chose to have a healthy celebration.

## This Year's National Walking Day Is April 6, 2022

The first Wednesday in April is National Walking Day. Since 2007, the American Heart Association (AHA) has sponsored this day to 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.

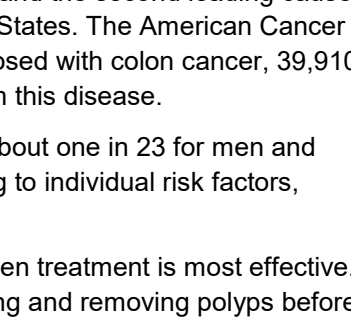
Did you know—

- Less than 48 percent of adults in the US get enough aerobic exercise to improve their health. Aerobic exercise includes walking. Get outside and get that heart rate up!
- All it takes is 15 minutes of walking to actually curb a craving for chocolate or other sweet-related foods. Next time you are looking for something sweet, take a walk around the block.
- A study found that those who walked 20 minutes per day for five days a week reported taking nearly 50 percent fewer sick days than those who exercised once per week or less.

How will your school or office celebrate the event? [Email your stories and photos to ERSC](#). [Find out why walking is the most popular form of exercise](#).

## We Want to Help You Quit for Good

TOBACCO CESSATION PROGRAM



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 Permanent have teamed up to offer a three-week tobacco cessation class, *Quit for Good*, for MCPS staff and their significant others. To register for an upcoming session of *Quit for Good*, [email Well Aware](#).

## A Diabetes Wake-up Call: Are You at Risk?

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 22, 2022. Held the fourth Tuesday of March each year, the American Diabetes Association Alert Day is a one-day wake-up call asking Americans to take a Diabetes Risk Test to find out if they are at risk for developing Type 2 diabetes. The Diabetes Risk Test asks participants to answer simple questions about 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. Those at high risk are encouraged to talk with their health care provider.

- [Take the Type 2 Diabetes Risk Test now!](#)
- [Learn risk factors for Type 2 diabetes](#)

## 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.

You can learn about these vital health numbers and reduce your financial contribution to your health insurance in 2023 by participating in Montgomery County Public Schools (MCPS) Wellness Initiatives program. To take full advantage of the program, complete a biometric health screening and health risk assessment yearly.

To find out how to complete your biometric health screening and health risk assessment and how your results will be reported to MCPS, please visit the [Wellness Initiatives web page](#).

## Colorectal Cancer Awareness Month

Colon cancer is the third most commonly diagnosed cancer and the second leading cause of cancer death in men and women combined in the United States. The American Cancer Society estimates that this year 95,520 people will be diagnosed with colon cancer, 39,910 will be diagnosed with rectal cancer, and 50,260 will die from this disease.

On average, the lifetime risk of developing colon cancer is about one in 23 for men and women combined (4.5 percent). This varies widely according to individual risk factors, however.

With regular screening, colon cancer can be found 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. [Learn more](#) about colorectal screenings.

## 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.

## 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.

This spring, Well Aware is continuing our online virtual live and recorded classes for your convenience. We offer something for everyone, including Zumba, HIIT Camp, yoga, and Core workouts. 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.

## Stress Less This Spring

Everything about our lives is different now, and change can be stressful. Stress wreaks havoc on your emotional wellness and 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.

Well Aware is continuing to offer online virtual live and recorded classes for your convenience. From mindfulness to seated yoga, yoga, and tai chi, we offer many classes will meet your needs. [Email Well Aware](#) for a monthly calendar of classes. [Opt in](#) to our wellness email distribution list.

## Spring 5k Training Program

Running is an accessible, inexpensive and effective way to improve your health and fitness, relieve stress, and boost your confidence. Whether you have never run or it's been a while since you last ran, the cooler fall weather is the perfect time to start training!

Following a successful fall session, the Run Farther & Faster MCPS Spring Virtual Group 5K Training Program will begin on March 27, 2022, and run through June 16, 2022. Participants will receive a comprehensive 12-week training calendar, weekly emails with training support and running-related information, as well as the ability to email certified running coaches with questions or concerns. The training calendar begins with run/walk intervals and progresses safely and gradually towards continuous running. It also includes strength workouts and form drills. For those who are interested, participants also have access to a private Facebook group to facilitate finding running partners.

This program is appropriate for new runners or runners who are returning after a hiatus. Space is limited to the first 50 registrants. [Register here](#) and [learn more](#).

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](#).