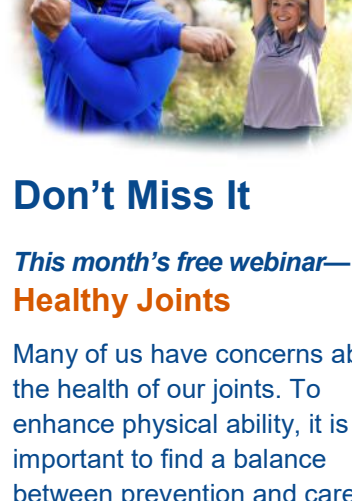


## January Well Aware eNews

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

- this month's wellness champions, members of a team from this fall's *MCPS on the Move* challenge who have shown us where consistency and support can lead;
- a webinar on safeguarding your joints for better function and overall health;
- this year's *Flights to Fitness* challenge;
- the *Head-to-Head* physical activity challenge;
- sleep health; and
- more!



### Don't Miss It

**This month's free webinar—Healthy Joints**

Many of us have concerns about the health of our joints. To enhance physical ability, it is important to find a balance between prevention and care. In this webinar, discover ways to safeguard your joints for better function and overall health.

**Wednesday, January 22, 2025**  
 Webinar  
 5:00–6:00 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**.

## Wellness Champions Show Us: Consistency and Team Support Are Key to Healthy Habits

### MCPS on the Move Team Who Let the Dogs Out, Outdoor Environmental Education Programs



*Team Who Let the Dogs Out, Outdoor Environmental Education Programs*

Brian Shilling, Courtney Hebert, Mark Granger, and Stephanie Lee, outdoor education teachers; Chad Lenz, classroom teacher; and Lee Derby, supervisor of the Outdoor Environmental Education Programs, have participated together in every Well Aware fall and spring physical activity challenge. Their challenge team, "Who Let the Dogs Out," demonstrates consistency and team support—key to prioritizing healthy habits and improved morale in their workplace.

Another bonus, they believe their participation improves job performance.

"Being healthy and well helps us do our jobs better," Courtney said. "We have to be very active as Outdoor Education staff, so it makes a more positive experience for everyone when we are healthy."

Why does this team participate in all of the Well Aware challenges?

"We love to challenge ourselves with friendly competition," Courtney said. "The group puts their competitive nature to work with the goal of earning the coveted grant money offered during the challenges. We love the incentives for winning the challenges. Participating also provides a way to come together as a team since we work at four different locations."

The group has advice for those thinking of joining an upcoming challenge.

"You don't have to be an athlete to stay active and healthy," Courtney said. "There are so many options to enter as an activity. And, it is nice to have teammates to remind each other to record our activity."

For details, visit Well Aware's [Flights to Fitness web page](#).

## Take the Wellness Initiative

If you are covered by an MCPS-provided medical insurance plan through Cigna or Kaiser Permanente, you can learn more about your health and reduce your contributions to your 2026 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 very simple. To receive the maximum 2 percent reduction on your health insurance premiums in 2026, you have until October 3, 2025, to complete—

- an online health risk assessment, and
- a biometric health screening.

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

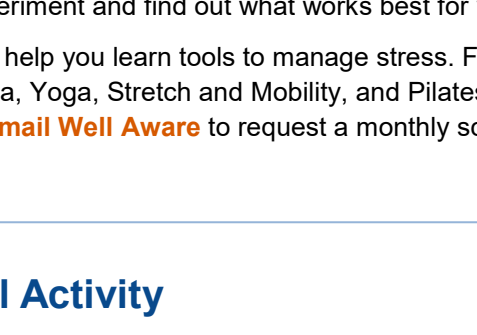
## Quit for Good! We Want to Help You Quit for Good

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 virtual tobacco cessation class, *Quit for Good*, for MCPS staff and their significant others. The next class begins on January 17, 2025. [Learn more](#).

## The MCPS on the Move Challenge Has Ended



More than 5,000 Montgomery County Public Schools employees spent the fall in reach of their goals during the *MCPS on the Move* physical activity challenge. They competed for prizes, and more importantly, adopted or maintained healthy lifestyles. Each of the top 15 schools averaged at least 65 minutes of physical activity per employee per day.

Congratulations to all those who improved their health by participating! Stay tuned for the spring challenge, which will begin in March.

## Group Forming Now for Winter Session of Head, Heart, and Hand

Registration is under way for the winter session of *Head, Heart, and Hand*, a fun and inspiring program that gives participants the knowledge, tools, and support to lose weight permanently and reach their health goals.

This 12-week wellness program is a comprehensive program of learning with weekly group coaching, designed to help participants prevent/reverse disease, improve their physical and mental health, and lose weight. This holistic program targets the root causes of common chronic diseases, including type 2 diabetes, high blood pressure, high cholesterol, arthritis, and more, while addressing all aspects of health, including nutrition, sleep, stress, mental health, and mindset.

**Email Well Aware** for more information and to register.

## Stress Less This Winter

Shorter days with less sunlight combined with cold weather lead to a more sedentary lifestyle. This can make a big difference in your mood and stress levels.

Effective stress management, on the other hand, helps you break the hold that 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, we offer many classes will meet your needs. **Email Well Aware** to request a monthly schedule of classes.

**Email Well Aware** to get the full schedule of classes.

## Wellbeats Wellness Time Savers Program

A new year is always a great opportunity to start fresh. But it can be challenging to fit new healthy habits into a busy schedule. As part of your benefits, you have access to Wellbeats Wellness. Give Wellbeats *Time Savers* program a try! This program is designed to help you prioritize your well-being, even with a busy schedule.

With short, effective workouts, mindfulness exercises, and nutrition tips, you can make significant strides towards a healthier, happier you. See the attached [program flyer](#) and [calendar](#).

What to expect—

- Quick and Effective Workouts—Intense less-than-10-minute workout videos.
- Mindful Moments—Simple mindfulness practices to reduce stress and improve focus.
- Nutrition Tips—Easy-to-follow advice for fueling your body.

Access Wellbeats via the mobile app or on your internet browser, and log in with your MCPS Outlook email address. See the attached [flyer](#) for more login details.

## 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.

## Share Your Wellness Stories and Encourage Your Coworkers!

Well Aware is proud of MCPS employees for all of the hard work they are doing to lead healthy lives. Share your stories and your spirit on X (formerly Twitter). 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.

## Well Aware Toolbox

Well Aware, the MCPS employee wellness program, offers the Well Aware Wellness Toolbox, a web page with 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. 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!

## 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 to participate](#) using password: mcpsmd.

## Well Aware and the Employee Assistance Program



### Monthly Connection: Sleep Health

*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.*

During the program, the body undergoes critical repair processes that help it fight illness, heal wounds, and recover from the stresses of day-to-day life. Adequate amounts of restful sleep have been convincingly tied to a healthier body (both inside and out), a better immune response, and a longer life.

#### EAP Resources

Many people take steps to prioritize their well-being with the start of a New Year. Getting enough good quality sleep is a core component of well-being, improving brain function, problem-solving skills, mood, and health. Sleep deprivation increases the risk of many health conditions, and has been linked to depression, suicide, and risk-taking behavior.

Learn more about sleep deprivation and resources to support better sleep:

- **How Sleep Affects Your Health** from the National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute (NHLBI).
- **Healthy Sleep Habits**, including strategies for shift workers from NHLBI.
- **Sleep Brochure** from NHLBI.
- Consider using this **Sleep Diary** from NHLBI to record and track information about your sleep.
- There are several other types of health conditions and sleep disorders that impact sleep. Talk to your doctor if you are concerned about your sleep.

The MCPS EAP is here to support you. For questions or help with a specific problem or personal concern, please contact the EAP at 240-740-6500 (Monday–Friday 8:30 a.m.–5:00 p.m.). You can also visit our [web page](#) on the MCPS website for additional information.

#### Well Aware Resources

- [Get enough sleep \(CDC\)](#)
- [Sleep Habits \(Mayo Clinic\)](#)
- [Better Sleep from Kaiser Permanente](#)
- [Sleep and Your Body Clock from Cigna](#)

## Kickoff Challenge

Join DreamFIT Training and Wellness for an invigorating eight-week fitness challenge starting January 13, 2025.

This comprehensive program is designed to kickstart your new year with energy and motivation, guiding participants through a transformative journey toward improved health and wellness. Each week, you'll engage in three workouts that will include a mix of strength training, cardio workouts, and flexibility exercises, tailored for all fitness levels.

Stephanie, owner of DreamFIT Training and Wellness, will provide personalized coaching, nutrition tips, and weekly check-ins to track your progress and keep you accountable. You'll also have the opportunity to connect with a supportive community of fellow MCPS challenges, sharing successes and overcoming obstacles together. No matter your goal, this challenge is the perfect way to set the tone for a successful year ahead. Don't miss out—sign up today and take the first step toward achieving your fitness goals in 2025. [Register here](#).

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](#).