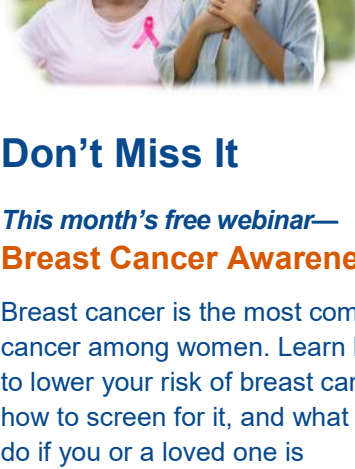


## October Well Aware eNews

Welcome to the October 2024 issue of *Well Aware eNews*! Read on to learn about—

- this month's wellness champions, a group of elementary school employees whose school has been designated as one of America's healthiest;
- a webinar on how to lower your risk of breast cancer, how to screen for it, and what to do if you or a loved one is diagnosed;
- the *MCPS on the Move* physical activity challenge;
- the importance of getting a flu shot;
- a foam roller workshop; and
- more!



### Don't Miss It

**This month's free webinar—Breast Cancer Awareness**

Breast cancer is the most common cancer among women. Learn how to lower your risk of breast cancer, how to screen for it, and what to do if you or a loved one is diagnosed. Together we can beat breast cancer.

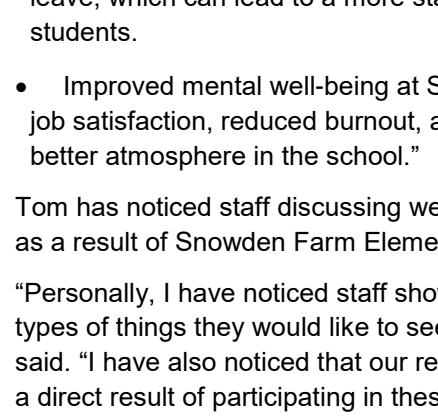
**Thursday, October 24, 2024 Webinar**  
4:30–5:30 p.m.

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**.

## Wellness Champions' School Designated as One of America's Healthiest

**Erin Kleinman, Tom Benco, Sherrie Cardea, Melanie Jackson, Snowden Farm Elementary School**



By working together, Snowden Farm Elementary School staff earned the designation as one of America's Healthiest Schools from the Alliance for a Healthier Generation. Staff Development Teacher Erin Kleinman, Physical Education Teacher Tom Benco, School Secretary Sherrie Cardea, and Music Teacher Melanie Jackson all were integral parts of staff wellness at the school and of preparing the application.

Erin elaborated on the positive impact on both the school environment and its staff.

"We believe the staff wellness program at our school has four key benefits," Erin said. "They are—

- A wellness program can boost staff productivity by improving energy levels, focus, and overall effectiveness. Healthier and happier staff at Snowden Farm are better equipped to manage their responsibilities, engage more effectively with students, and contribute to a positive school culture.
- Staff who feel valued and supported at Snowden Farm are more likely to stay at the school and be more engaged in their work. This can result in lower turnover rates and more experienced, cohesive team, which benefits students and the overall school community in Clarksburg.
- Wellness programs help staff maintain better physical health, reduce the risk of chronic illnesses, and manage stress more effectively. Healthier staff are less likely to take sick leave, which can lead to a more stable and consistent learning environment for students.
- Improved mental well-being at Snowden Farm Elementary School can lead to greater job satisfaction, reduced burnout, and a more positive attitude, which can translate into a better atmosphere in the school."

Tom has noticed staff discussing wellness more and a strengthening of staff relationships as a result of Snowden Farm Elementary School's wellness program.

"Personally, I have noticed staff showing a willingness to express their ideas as far as what types of things they would like to see us do as a school to further staff wellness," Tom said. "I have also noticed that our relationships with one another have become stronger as a direct result of participating in these types of programs. I have seen friendships enhanced by taking a short 15-minute walk/break together."

Melanie added that the chance to build relationships through wellness activities has been beneficial.

"I have had a chance to build relationships with other staff members who I normally almost never get a chance to interact with on a daily basis," Melanie said. "My mood is enhanced for the better knowing that I have a workout/walk to look forward to at the end of the day."

Erin had this to say about the benefits of wellness activities to staff and parent relationships.

"Staff mental energy seems more balanced and, in general, positive when people have a chance to work out together after a difficult day, Erin said. "Parent and staff relationships have been strengthened due to the focus on engaging the full community in wellness activities such as our staff vs. parent kickball game at the beginning of the school year."

Snowden Farm has offered numerous staff wellness programs:

- Staff Walking Club began last fall with some of our paraeducators, who found it to be helpful as a way to unwind, build relationships, and foster a sense of community among our staff members.
- Dance Club is held by the school's music teacher, Mrs. Melanie Jackson, who holds weekly dance classes in the music room for staff members.
- Staff vs. Parent Kickball Game, a tradition at the school, is a great way to kick off the school year and bridge the gap between staff and parents.
- Staff Workouts are after-school workout clubs for staff to work on a variety of fitness components such as cardiovascular endurance, strength training, and flexibility.
- Well Aware's fall wellness challenges

- Creation and maintenance of a staff wellness room to provide a place for staff to recharge
- Intentional relationship building within staff meetings to connect adults beyond instruction.

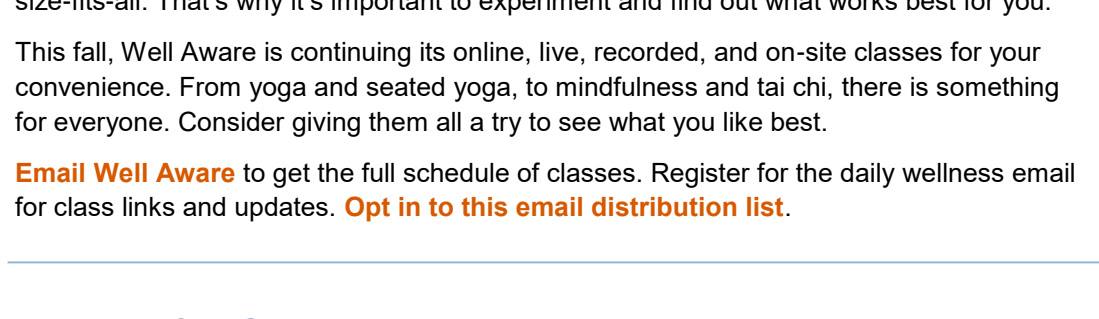
Snowden Farm plans the following staff activities/goals for 2025:

- Staff vs. Student beach ball volleyball game,
- Staff vs. Staff Floor Hockey,
- Walking Club,
- Dance Club, and

To increase the number of after-school staff workout opportunities.

- An end-of-year rematch of the staff vs. parent kickball game!
- To publish nutritional tidbits in our monthly staff newsletter.

"We are proud of the work we are doing and continue to do for our staff at Snowden Farm Elementary School in regards to staff wellness," Erin said. "We look forward to sharing our ideas and implementing other schools' successful ideas. Health is Wealth!"



## MCPS On the Move Is Back!

This fall, we have reprised the *MCPS on the Move* physical activity challenge. While we are already a few weeks into the challenge, it is not too late to start! Continue Well Aware's goal of building long-lasting healthy habits. Participate as an individual or as part of a team. Schools and offices can work together and create their own *MCPS on the Move* teams, encourage activity, and support each other through an eight-week activity challenge.

**Learn more about the MCPS on the Move fall challenge!**

## Get InStep with Diabetes This Fall

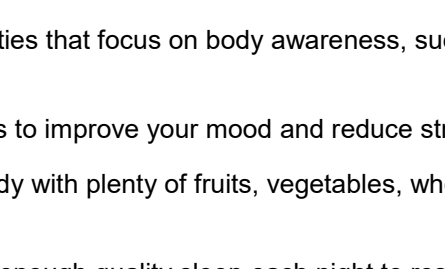
InStep with Diabetes is a series of three, one-hour classes that will help you better understand diabetes and the lifestyle changes needed to support healthy living. A Kaiser Permanente health educator will discuss not only why healthy eating, physical activity, and blood sugar control are important for diabetes management, but also ways to incorporate these changes into your life. The facilitator also will share resources and travel tips to further support you.

You do not have to be diabetic or pre-diabetic (or a Kaiser Permanente member) to attend this course. You can attend to support a friend or family member by learning helpful information.

Our next class begins in October. For more information **email Well Aware** and **see this flyer**.

## Well Aware and the Employee Assistance Program

### Monthly Connection: Breast Cancer Awareness Month



*Mental and physical health are linked. Recent research has shown that an improvement or decline in one can lead to an improvement or decline in the other. The great news is that the body and brain are both very responsive to positive change!*

*For this reason, the MCPS EAP (Employee Assistance Program) and Well Aware (the MCPS Employee Wellness Program), are excited to work together to bring you monthly topics focusing on mental and physical health. These resources will help you align your wellness journey to ensure that you are focusing on both physical and mental health.*

#### Breast Cancer Awareness Month

After skin cancer, breast cancer is the most common cancer among American women. Every October, people all over the world show their support for those affected by breast cancer and raise awareness of the importance of screening, treatment, and prevention.

#### EAP Resources

Though a physical illness, it is normal to experience a range of emotions when diagnosed with breast cancer, throughout the treatment process, and during remission. It is also typical for others to experience a variety of reactions when their loved one is diagnosed.

Learn about the impact of breast cancer on emotional and mental health—as well as how to access support—in the list of resources below. And remember, the EAP is here to help. Call the EAP at 240-740-6500 (Monday–Friday 8:30 a.m.–5:00 p.m.).

- **Emotions and Cancer**
- **How Breast Cancer Can Affect Mental Health**
- **Cancer Support Community**
- **Reach to Recovery: Peer Support for Breast Cancer**
- **Susan G. Komen Breast Cancer Helpline**
- **EAP will conduct in-person and virtual screenings**

The EAP will conduct in-person and virtual screenings for depression, anxiety disorder, bipolar disorder, and post-traumatic stress disorder on Thursday, October 10, 2024. The free and confidential screenings take approximately 30 minutes and are available to MCPS employees and their adult (18+) household members. Those who sign up will complete a brief screening questionnaire and speak one-on-one with a mental health professional. If appropriate, referrals will be made for a complete evaluation. Call the EAP at 240-740-6500 if you have questions and to schedule your appointment.

#### Well Aware Resources

In May 2023, the United States Preventive Services Task Force (USPSTF) issued new draft recommendations for breast cancer screening that, notably, lowered the age at which women should start screening from 50 to 40 years old.

- **Learn more about screening guidelines.**
- **Read information on family history, genetic counseling, and lifestyle choices.**
- **Learn what it means if your mammogram says that you have dense breasts.**

On Friday October 25, 2024, join your MCPS coworkers and wear pink to raise awareness. This is a great opportunity to speak with coworkers, family, and friends about the warning signs and to encourage self-checks and mammograms. Take pictures of you and your coworkers wearing pink and **email them to ERSC**.

## Stress Less this Fall

As summer winds down, and we get back into the fall routine, we need to find time for stress management. Stress can negatively affect your emotional wellness, as well as 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 fall, Well Aware is continuing its online, live, recorded, and on-site classes for your convenience. From yoga and seated yoga, to mindfulness and tai chi, there is something for everyone. Consider giving them all a try to see what you like best.

**Email Well Aware** to get the full schedule of classes. Register for the daily wellness email for class links and updates. **Opt-in to this email distribution list**.

## Join Us for Online Physical Activity

Movement 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 fall, Well Aware is continuing its online, live, and recorded classes and has added some on-site, in-person 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. Register for the daily wellness email for class links and updates. **Opt-in to this email distribution list**.

## Avoid the Flu This Year: Get Your Flu Shot Before the End of October

The best way to prevent flu and its potentially serious complications is by getting a yearly flu vaccine. Even when a flu vaccination does not prevent illness entirely, it has been shown in several studies to reduce the severity of illness in people who get vaccinated but still get sick.

The typical flu is active each year from October through April. An estimated 5-20 percent of Americans get the flu each year with symptoms lasting for up to two weeks.

The flu vaccine takes about two weeks to be effective, so it is important to get the vaccine as early as possible. During the two weeks after vaccination, antibodies develop in the body and provide protection against the flu. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommends that everyone get a flu vaccine each year by the end of October.

Both Cigna and Kaiser Permanente have laid out detailed plans for getting this year's flu shot.

- **Cigna**
- **Kaiser Permanente**

Here are some other resources to show you how to protect yourself from colds and flu:

- **Prevention Habits to Help Prevent Flu** from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.
- **Cold remedies: What works, what doesn't, what can't hurt** from the Mayo Clinic.
- **Protect Yourself from the Seasonal Flu** from the Office of Disease Prevention and Health. Promotion.

## Develop Healthy Habits with Wellbeats Wellness

Increasing evidence suggests that the ability to connect your thoughts to your body can greatly impact your mental and physical wellness. What we think can impact how we feel. Here are five ways to take better care of yourself and strengthen your mind-body connection:

- **Regular exercise**—Engage in physical activities you enjoy, such as going for a walk, jogging, lifting weights, or any other form of exercise.
- **Mindful movement**—Practice activities that focus on body awareness, such as yoga, Pilates, or tai chi.
- **Meditation**—Try guided meditations to improve your mood and reduce stress.
- **Healthy nutrition**—Nourish your body with plenty of fruits, vegetables, whole grains, and lean proteins.
- **Adequate sleep**—Prioritize getting enough quality sleep each night to restore your body and mind.

Go to your Wellbeats Wellness account to find more ways to improve the mind-body connection. Wellbeats Wellness is your complimentary virtual wellness program with 1,200+ expert-led, on-demand fitness, nutrition, and mindfulness classes for all ages, levels, abilities, and interests. **See this resource from Wellbeats** to strengthen your mind-body connection.

## 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. **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.

## Wellness Initiatives

### October 4 is the Deadline to Save Money on Your Health Insurance in 2025

The Montgomery County Public Schools (MCPS) Wellness Initiatives program provides you with incentives to reduce your health insurance costs for 2025 and beyond. If you are covered by an MCPS-provided medical insurance plan, complete a biometric health screening and your insurance provider's online health risk assessment by October 4, 2024—and yearly thereafter—to take advantage of the rate reductions in 2025 and beyond.

You can pay 1 percent less of the total cost of your health insurance in 2025 by seeing your doctor or, if you are a Cigna member, visiting a Quest Patient Services Center for an annual physical. For an additional 1 percent credit, complete a health risk assessment on your medical plan's website by October 4, 2024.

Kaiser Permanente members: Be sure to log in to your plan's incentive portal to consent to your participation in the program. Without your consent, your information will not be reported.

Take the Wellness Initiative! **Learn more**.

## 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.

## Virtual Staff Wellness Day

During the Professional Day on Wednesday, October 18, 2024, Well Aware, Kaiser Permanente, and Cigna are coming together to present a virtual wellness day! Take a few minutes out of your professional day to give one of our wellness programs a try. This is a great opportunity to sample some of the classes that Well Aware hosts throughout the year, as well as prioritize your health and wellness. **See the class schedule, links, and class descriptions**.

## Omada for Cigna AND Kaiser Permanente Members

Omada is a personalized program that helps members lose weight and create long-lasting health changes.

Qualifying participants will 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

To learn more and apply, visit **omadahealth**.

## 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.

## Foam Roller Workshop

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**  
October 6, 2024  
2:00 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**.