

9 dimensions of wellness

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Your health and well-being isn't just about nutrition and exercise.

ALTHOUGH nurses take great care of others, they generally don't take care of themselves. As a result, we're a population at risk for multiple chronic conditions. In 2017, the National Academy of Medicine launched an action collaborative on clinician well-being and resilience, acknowledging that a high percentage of physicians, nurses, and other healthcare professionals suffer from burnout, compassion fatigue, depression, and poor work-life balance. And in a recent national study of nurses, over half reported suboptimal mental and physical health. That's dangerous for both nurses and their patients: Nurses who reported poor health had a 26% to 71% higher likelihood of making errors.

Personally and professionally, we must take better care of ourselves. The benefits affect our future and increase our quality of life right now.

A personal story—Dr. Bernadette Melnyk

My mom sneezed and had a hemorrhagic stroke right in front of me when I was home alone with her at age 15. She had a history of headaches for well over a year for which she saw her physician a week before she died. She was diagnosed with hypertension and given a prescription for an antihypertensive medication, which my dad found in her purse after she passed. Maybe if she had filled that prescription and started taking the medication, her stroke could have been prevented. I suffered from post-traumatic stress disorder for a couple of years and sorely missed having my mom around to see me graduate from high school and college and go on to have my three beautiful daughters.

I share this story to appeal to your emotions so that you will engage in healthy lifestyle behaviors and take better care of yourself. If you don't do it for yourself, do it so that you'll be around for the people who love you.

The 9 dimensions

Wellness is multifaceted and interconnected. Engaging in physical activity, eating healthy, and taking precautions not to get sick are obvious components to wellness, but other areas also should be considered. For example, spiritual and financial wellness play a role in your health and well-being.

At The Ohio State University, we use a comprehensive integrative approach to wellness that promotes nine dimensions of well-being for our faculty, staff, and students. We also have a culture of wellness that makes choosing healthy options easy (in other words, making them the social norm).

We'll be writing a series of articles for *American Nurse Today*, each focusing on one of the nine dimensions. To start, here's an overview.

Physical wellness: Your physical wellness isn't limited to exercise; it includes healthy eating, proactively taking care of medical issues that arise, and maintaining healthy daily practices. Four healthy behaviors can help you substantially reduce the risk for heart disease, diabetes, back pain, and many other chronic diseases:

- Get 30 minutes of physical activity at least 5 days a week.
- Limit alcohol intake to one drink a day if you're a woman and two drinks a day if you're a man.
- Don't smoke.
- Eat a healthy diet, which includes five fruits and vegetables a day.

Reduce your risk for chronic disease even further by practicing daily stress reduction and sleeping at least 7 hours a night.

Emotional wellness: When you're emotionally well, you can identify, express, and manage your full range of feelings. If feelings become overwhelming or interfere with your functioning, seek help. When you feel stressed, down, or anxious, use cognitive-behavioral skills and mindfulness techniques to help keep the blues and anxiety at bay.

Financial wellness: Almost three in four Americans surveyed in a recent American Psychological Association study said they experience financial stress, which

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can affect people physically, emotionally, and psychologically and result in unhealthy coping behaviors. Financial well-being includes being fully aware of your financial state and budget and managing your money to achieve realistic goals. When you analyze, plan well, and take control of your spending, you can make significant changes in how you save and ultimately how you feel.

Intellectual wellness: Just as a flexible body indicates physical health, a flexible mind indicates intellectual health. When you're intellectually healthy, you value lifelong learning, foster critical thinking, develop moral reasoning, expand worldviews, and engage in education for the pursuit of knowledge. Any time you learn a new skill or concept, attempt to understand a different viewpoint, or exercise your mind with puzzles and games, you're building intellectual well-being. And studies show that intellectual exercise may improve the physical structure of your brain to help prevent cognitive decline.

Career wellness: Engaging in work that provides personal satisfaction and enrichment and is consistent with your values, goals, and lifestyle will keep you professionally healthy. After sleep, we spend most of our time at work, so ask yourself if your work motivates you and lets you use your abilities to their full potential. If it doesn't, you may need to re-evaluate how you spend your working hours. Even if you can't change where you work, you can change your approach to the stressors and challenges you face.

Social wellness: Building a network of support based on interdependence, mutual respect, and trust with your friends, family, and coworkers leads to social wellness. Developing a sensitivity and awareness toward others' feelings is another feature of social wellness. Evidence shows that social connections not only help us deal with stress, but also keep us healthy.

Creative wellness: Creative wellness means valuing and participating in a diverse range of arts and cultural experiences to understand and appreciate your surrounding world. Expressing your emotions and views through the arts can be a great way to relieve stress. Don't let self-judgment or perfectionism get in the way of this important dimension of your wellness. Allow yourself creative freedom to doodle, dance, or sing without worrying about whether you're doing it well. And take time to appreciate others' creative efforts.

Environmental wellness: If you don't think the environment is part of your wellness, consider this: Evidence shows that air pollution can cause lung cancer, the number one cancer killer in the United States. Being environmentally well means recognizing the responsibility to preserve, protect, and improve the environment and appreciating your connection to nature. Environmental wellness intersects with social wellness

when you work to conserve the environment for future generations and improve conditions for others around the world.

Spiritual wellness: You can seek spiritual wellness in many ways, including quiet self-reflection, reading, and open dialogue with others. For the spiritually well person, exploring the depth of human purpose, pondering human connectedness, and seeking answers to questions like, "Why are we here?" is okay. Spiritual wellness includes being open to exploring your own beliefs and respecting others' beliefs.

Take action

Now that you're thinking about your own well-being, take time to start a journal about your health and wellness. Awareness is the first step toward action. Write down how you're feeling physically, the stressors in your life, what you'd like to accomplish, and how you'd like to feel a week, 6 months, and a year from now. Setting goals for your well-being can make a significant positive difference in your life and others' lives.

What would you do in the next 2 to 5 years if you knew you couldn't fail? Put the answer to that question somewhere you can see it every day. Evidence supports that people who write down their dreams and goals are more likely to achieve them. And keep this in mind: It takes 30 days to make or break a habit. Set one wellness goal for the next 30 days. Make it something that won't be too difficult to achieve. For example, if you currently engage in physical activity for 10 minutes 3 days a week, strive for 15 minutes 3 days a week.

The steps you take today to safeguard and improve your wellness can lead you on a journey to optimal health, well-being, self-discovery, and satisfaction. And you'll help others around you, too. Be well. ★

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