

Words of Wellness



June 2021

Creating a Wellness Lifestyle

Wellness is a philosophy that embraces a way of living, ultimately helping us enjoy a more satisfying, productive, and happy life. Wellness is defined as a conscious, deliberate process that requires a person to become aware of and make choices for a more satisfying lifestyle.

A *wellness lifestyle* is balanced and includes cultivating healthy habits and decreasing unhealthy habits and behaviors. Healthy habits include getting enough sleep and rest, eating nourishing foods, being physically active, participating in some meaningful productive activity, setting aside brief moments to pause and breathe and being with others in mutually supportive ways. By making healthy choices we are likely to experience a better quality of life and it becomes easier to support wellness for ourselves, our family, and people we support.

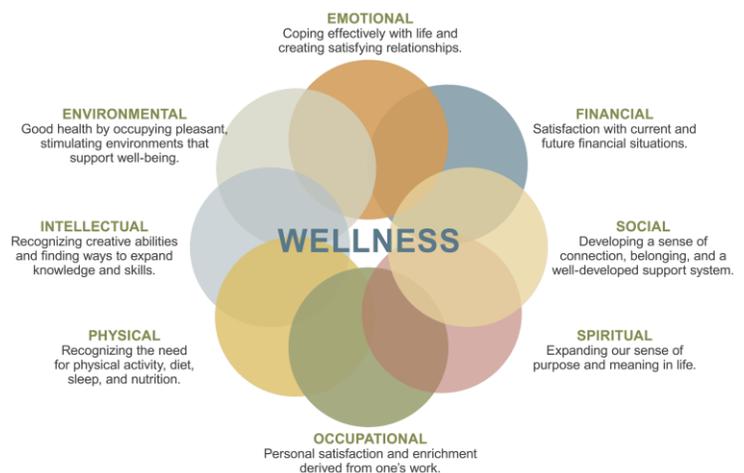
Physical activity is a great way to maintain your wellness and prevent diseases. Just taking a walk can bring about positive benefits physically and emotionally. Spring is a great time to create or reactivate a walking routine.

Walking provides many benefits, can be done almost anywhere, and requires no special equipment. For people with mental health challenges, [research](#) shows that walking provides physical health benefits as well as reduced symptoms. However, they many need extra support for creating a habit of regular walking. For example, they may need help overcoming barriers and staying motivated. Walking groups and activity trackers may be useful

Sleep is critical for physical health and mood, as well as memory, attention, concentration, and other cognitive functions. A recent [survey](#) of people with mental health and/or substance use disorders found that more than 75% had poor sleep. Many were not aware of their habits that likely contributed to their sleep problems. This suggests they may benefit from help redesigning their routines, especially evening activities, to improve the amount and quality of their sleep.

Take time throughout the day to **pause and breathe**. Small moments or longer meditation or relaxation breaks can help you reduce stress and move mindfully through your tasks and activities. Not sure how to start? You can find a series of [self-care guides](#) online that can introduce you to the value and process of these self-care moments.

It is easier to make lifestyle changes if you have someone else with you along your journey. To find a **wellness partner**, talk with friends and family members. Consider joining an existing wellness group or a self-help group. Support and encouragement can be an important factor in sustaining health promoting behavior change.



Brush, Floss, See Your Dentist

A smile and healthy teeth and gums can increase our comfort and quality of life. Good dental care is associated with better health and longer life.

A 2011 study¹ of older adults who were followed for nine years found that toothbrushing at night before bed, using dental floss every day, and visiting the dentist predicted longer life. For people without these positive habits, risk increased between 30% and 50%. Mortality also increased with increasing number of missing teeth, even when the person had dentures.

A more recent study² reported a relationship between poor oral health and many different illnesses that cause early death. While this study did not report on at home dental care, it did begin with an examination of oral health, identifying people with dental plaque (a sticky film on the teeth), dental calculus (a crusty substance also called tartar), and gum disease. This large study followed over 75,000 people and found that risk of death was increased for people with plaque, gum disease, and missing teeth. That risk included deaths by cancer, cardiovascular disease, and other causes.

Both studies suggest a link between dental health and eating a healthy diet. Poor oral health and missing teeth may lead to a poor diet, especially as mouth pain can make it difficult to eat fresh fruits and vegetables—two important components of eating well every day. However, poor oral health may contribute to risk independent of diet.

The 2011 study also noted that oral infections, such as certain types of gum disease are related to a variety of health conditions, including heart disease, stroke, atherosclerosis (plaque build-up in the arteries), pneumonia, and other respiratory disease. Some previous studies also have reported a link between dental plaque and cancer.

The connection between poor oral health, illness, and death may be explained by oral infections triggering inflammation throughout the body, which could contribute to illness and hasten death. The bottom line: Good oral health will make you feel better and may help you live longer!

Oral Hygiene Tips

You can improve your oral hygiene with a little basic knowledge, even if you don't have access to healthcare or a safe, consistent setting to practice oral hygiene routines. Developing the right habits can help prevent later costs that come with crowns or root canal procedures, or from losing teeth.

By following these basic tips, you may achieve a better state better health and well-being.

- If you carry your toothbrush, toothpaste, and floss in a pocket or purse, seal them in a plastic zipper bag or other container with a small air pocket. This protects the toothbrush while preventing molds from growing.
- Do not smoke or chew tobacco.
- Do not eat candy, drink soda, or anything with lots of sugar that doesn't benefit your health.
- If you can get to a dentist, have your teeth cleaned every six months.

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Let a Smile Be Your Umbrella



Whenever skies are gray,
Don't worry or fret,
A smile will bring the sunshine,
And you'll never get wet!

Oral Hygiene Tips (continued from page 2)

Brushing:

- Use a toothbrush with soft bristles that is long enough to reach all of your teeth comfortably.
- Brush along the gum line softly. Brushing harder could cause damage to the gums.
- Hold the toothbrush at a 45-degree angle to your teeth when brushing.
- Brush 1-2 teeth at a time for about 5-10 seconds each. Choose a popular song (around 3 minutes) to help you brush for the recommended length of time.
- Brush the tongue and the roof of the mouth to get rid of extra bacteria.
- Spit out the toothpaste and rinse with water.
- Rinse the toothbrush off with water.
- Brush your teeth at least twice a day—once in the morning and once at night.
- Replace toothbrushes every 3-4 months.

Flossing:

- Floss in-between two teeth at a time. For each tooth, use a clean piece of floss.
- Floss right before bedtime to prevent bacteria from growing overnight.

For more information:

<https://medlineplus.gov/dentalhealth.html>

<https://www.nia.nih.gov/health/taking-care-your-teeth-and-mouth>

Flossing: <https://www.mouthhealthy.org/en/az-topics/f/flossing>

Brushing: <https://www.mouthhealthy.org/en/az-topics/t/toothbrushes>

Journaling for Wellness

Keeping journal has been known for centuries to support emotional wellness. As we have described in past issues, a gratitude journal spans the emotional and spiritual dimensions. The typical approach to keeping a gratitude journal is to write daily of things you did, received, or encountered that day that made you feel grateful. This can help a person whose negative mood or depressive symptoms impact their daily activities and/or sense of enjoyment or satisfaction.

Journaling is part of many practices of mindfulness. Mindfulness, including journaling, also is a key part of Dialectical Behavior Therapy (DBT). Many Cognitive Behavior Therapy (CBT) and DBT self-help work-books are built around written exercises, which are a form of journaling. In CBT, journaling can take many forms and is used to assist people in becoming more aware of their harmful thoughts and behaviors, while also establishing healthier coping skills and incorporating growth and change into their lives. A journaling assignment may involve identifying specific thoughts, resultant feelings, and related behaviors, and then to journal about any changes that result from altering those thoughts.

Journaling can help you to become mindful of physical wellness, such as through using use a food diary, sleep log, or pain tracking chart. Other ways to use a journal in managing health conditions include tracking physical activity and medication use.

To promote intellectual wellness, consider journaling about topics that interest or inspire you. Journals are a key tool for structuring creative writing, graphic arts, and myriad other academic pursuits. Books that start as someone's journal are among some of the most popular books we read.

Journaling is an **activity** that has positive impacts on many wellness dimensions.

Days in June

June 6, 2021 *National Gardening Exercise Day*

[National Garden Clubs](#) has ideas for what to do this day that starts National Garden Week.

Jun 19, 2021 *Juneteenth*

Learn more from the [Smithsonian](#) about the importance of celebrating the date that, in 1865, Union General Gordon Granger enslaved African Americans in Galveston, Texas, of their freedom and the end of the Civil War.

June 21, 2021 *International Yoga Day*

In 2014, the [United Nations](#) made this day official!

Caregiver Self-Care

Both formal (paid) and informal (unpaid) caregivers who support people with disabilities are at risk of feeling overwhelmed and burned out. A [program](#) to address that risk provided training in self-care over five weeks. The program taught about wellness, self-care, mindfulness, and yoga-based information, with practices during each session. Participants enjoyed the program, which had a high rate of retention. They found the content easy to understand, the strategies helpful, and the peer support valuable. As one person said, “If you exercise and you don’t eat well, or manage your stress, then you may not sleep well, which, in turn, will affect you all around.”

References and Resources

The illustrations in this issue are listed online as free for reuse without attribution from pixabay.com

The definition of wellness and the wellness wheel image are from: Swarbrick, M. (2006). A wellness approach. *Psychiatric Rehabilitation Journal*, 29(4), 311–314, <https://doi.org/10.2975/29.2006.311.314> AND Swarbrick, M. (2012). A Wellness Approach to Mental Health Recovery. In A. Rudnick (Ed), *Recovery of People with Mental Illness: Philosophical and Related Perspectives*. Oxford Press. Please do not use the definition or image without permission.

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Walker, M. (2017). *Why we sleep*. New York, NY: Scribner

Download self-care booklets and access videos at <https://www.care2caregivers.com/self-care/>

¹ Paganini-Hill, A., White, S. C., & Atchison, K. A. (2011). Dental health behaviors, dentition, and mortality in the elderly: the leisure world cohort study. *Journal of Aging Research*, Article ID 156061. Retrieved from www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3124861.

² Adolph, M. et al. (2017). Oral health in relation to all-cause mortality: The IPC cohort study. *Nature: Scientific Reports*, 7, 44604. Retrieved from <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC5353629/pdf/srep44604.pdf>.

The lyrics for the 1927 song *Let Your Smile Be Your Umbrella* were written by Irving Kahal and Francis Wheeler. Sammy Fain wrote the music and Bing Crosby was one of the big names who recorded it.

Swarbrick, M., Gould Fogerite, S., Spagnolo, A., & Nemeč, P. (2021, January 13). Caregivers of people with disabilities: A program to enhance wellness self-care. *Journal of Psychosocial Nursing & MH Services*, 1-8. Online ahead of print.

For more on journaling, see the November 2019 and April 2020 issues of *Words of Wellness* and our workbook, *Journaling—A Wellness Tool*, available at <https://www.center4healthandsdc.org/integrated-health--mental-health.html>