

Wellness Tip Cultivating Whole Health

Whole Health is an approach to wellness that is heavily utilized by the VA healthcare system. The approach can be helpful for anyone looking to improve well-being and live life to the fullest. Whole Health encourages making intentional choices about health based upon your desires, values, and goals.

Whole Health emphasizes multiple building blocks of wellness, which include:

1. **Moving the body:** Movement and exercise can increase your energy, strength, and flexibility. It improves your physical and mental health.
2. **Recharge:** Rest, relaxation, and sleep recharge and refuel you. It supports physical and mental functioning, lowers stress, and can promote a sense of calm.
3. **Food and drink:** What you eat and drink can nourish and strengthen your body and mind, and has an impact on your mood, energy level, and physical health and performance.
4. **Personal development:** Learning and growing are important at all stages of life. We feel better when we can do things that matter to us.
5. **Family, friends, and co-workers (& pets):** Our relationships have a significant effect on our health. People who have a supportive network do better than those who feel isolated.
6. **Spirit and soul:** Connecting with something greater than yourself may provide a sense of meaning and purpose, grounding, peace, or sense of comfort. This can help you clarify what is really important for your life.
7. **Surroundings:** The spaces you inhabit – both indoors and out – directly affect your health. It includes where you live, work, learn, and play. If under your control, you can work to change aspects of your surroundings so that you feel best.
8. **Power of the mind:** The mind directly affects the state of your being. Your thoughts are powerful and can affect your physical and mental health. Examining (and perhaps changing) your mindset can aid in coping and healing.

When thinking about your overall health, consider your current status within the eight areas of well-being. Where are your strengths? Where are your areas of challenge? Consider for each area how important it is to you. Given its level of importance, how satisfied are you with how you're feeling in that area? What might life look like if you had the health you want?

If you notice a big discrepancy between a specific area's level of importance and your current satisfaction in that area, refrain from beating yourself up about it. Acknowledge the discrepancy in your life right now and see it as an invitation to spend some time making small improvements in that area. Also, realize you do not have to move mountains by yourself – there are sources of support outside of yourself including professional care, complementary/alternative healing practices, community resources, and other places/spaces/people that support your health.

If you set a goal for yourself in a particular area, clarify why you want to improve health in that area. Then identify for yourself the following:

- What can I do on a daily basis to improve in this area? [Keep it small and achievable!]
- How might I include my professional care team?
- What other resources or educational tools can I use?
- How can I involve my community/others to support me in this component of health?

If you would like to talk with someone about your overall well-being, or for any other questions or concerns, feel free to contact the Medical Student Counseling Center to talk with a counselor or schedule an appointment:

osac-mscc@uiowa.edu | 319-335-8056 | 1240 MERF

Check out the MSCC Website for past Wellness Tips:

<https://medicine.uiowa.edu/md/student-support/student-counseling/mscc-wellness-programs-and-resources>

Remember, life is really hard at times - be gentle with yourself!

Rebecca Stinson, PhD, ABPP

Senior Behavioral Health Clinician

Medical Student Counseling Center

Roy J. and Lucille A. Carver College of Medicine

University of Iowa

Pronouns: she/her