



WHAT IS WELLNESS?

Wellness is defined as “an active process of becoming aware of and making choices towards a more successful existence.”¹

Because living a “successful existence” means something different to each individual, wellness can be many things, but it generally includes the pursuit of health, defined as “a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity”² and working towards achieving one’s full potential.

Your pathway to wellness can be:

- Good health
- Saving more money
- Healthy relationships
- Being good to yourself
- Showing gratitude
- Keeping good friends close
- Taking care of your community
- Eating one less cookie
- Looking for a new job
- Learning how to let go
- Walking instead of driving
- Playing with your pet
- A day at the spa
- Eating fresh fruit from your own garden
- Mastering a difficult yoga pose



Did you know?

- Connecting with others can help you to enjoy the times when you are alone.
- Staying positive can improve your mood and your health.
- If you quit smoking now, in 20 minutes your heart rate drops, and in 12 hours the carbon monoxide (a gas that can be toxic) in your blood drops to normal.
- Exercising in “spurts” can be just as effective as continuous exercise.
- Helping others may help you experience less depression.
- Drinking beverages with caffeine should be stopped 6-8 hours before bed to ensure a more restful sleep.
- Creating joy and satisfaction can be easy with little things such as making a gourmet meal while listening to your favorite music, treating yourself to a massage, or even taking a few moments to admire nature.
- What you drink is just as important as what you eat.
- Spirituality can give you a sense of purpose and meaning.
- Writing down your problems can help shift your thinking about the issue and ultimately improve your mood.
- It is essential to choose a provider who understands the importance of the both of you working collaboratively regarding your health care.
- Stress management techniques are important because chronic (long-lasting) stress can change your brain and the way you function.

¹The Six Dimensions of Wellness, National Wellness Institute, http://www.nationalwellness.org/?page=Six_Dimensions, 1976
² Preamble to the Constitution of the World Health Organization as adopted by the International Health Conference, New York, 19-22 June, 1946; signed on 22 July 1946 by the representatives of 61 States (Official Records of the World Health Organization, no. 2, p. 100) and entered into force on 7 April 1948.



FOUR SIMPLE STEPS

Taking good care of your body and mind can make a difference in how well you do in your day-to-day life and how well you manage change. Exercising, eating right, getting enough rest and relaxing will not only set you on the right path to wellness, but also help you achieve and enjoy daily activities more and improve how you deal with life's challenges. Caring for yourself may take a little extra time, but you will feel better and more successful. Here's what you need and why it helps:



A healthy diet:

- Improves your ability to learn.
- Means eating a nutritious breakfast everyday. Skipping meals leads to a lack of energy.
- Includes eating something nutritious every time you have a meal. Try substituting processed foods with a salad or swapping something fried for a piece of fruit.
- Requires limiting your alcohol intake.
- Avoids excessive amounts of caffeine. Caffeine dehydrates you. Drink at least 8 glasses of water a day to prevent dehydration.

Regular exercise:

- Elevates mood, reduces stress, increases energy level, improves appearance, and stimulates the release of endorphins and serotonin, which makes you happier.
- Increases alertness and creativity.
- Improves your overall mental and physical well-being. Even taking a 15-minute walk, 3 times a week, can help.
- Keeps you active and also creates more opportunities to meet new friends!
- Decreases stress. On days when you are feeling overwhelmed, hit the gym or do another type of exercise.



Relaxation:

- Means taking time each day to unwind, especially before sleeping. Listen to music, read or do whatever you enjoy. Alcohol or drugs are not the way to go.
- Offers a distraction from problems, a sense of competence and many other benefits.
- Means getting a good laugh. Laughing decreases pain, may help your heart and lungs, promotes muscle relaxation and can reduce anxiety.

Plenty of rest:

- Means getting at least 7-9 hours of sleep. This is essential and will make you more attentive and active. Inadequate sleep can lead to mood changes and lowered resistance to illness.
- Provides the physical and psychological resources to cope with everyday life. Without it, you have to work harder to get daily tasks done and you have less energy.
- Includes cutting back on alcohol consumption because it can disturb your sleep. Though you might fall asleep faster, your body will not be as rested.





UNDERSTANDING THE SOCIAL DETERMINANTS OF HEALTH

"Our zip code may be more important than our genetic code"

What are the social determinants of health?

The social determinants of health are the conditions, in which children, youth, and families are born, grow up, live and work, as well as the quality and accessibility to health care (Shern, Steverman, Ahmed, & Shea, 2011). Where you live can be a significant indicator of how well you live as well as how long you live. Such non-medical factors influence health and well-being, including health-related knowledge, attitudes, beliefs, or behaviors.² Socioeconomic inequalities in health have been widening for decades. In the United States the data consistently show that people living in poverty, and particularly those who are minorities, bear a disproportionate burden of exposure to unhealthy environments and are at greater risk for mental and behavioral health-related conditions.³ In addition to health literacy, gender, education, sexual orientation and geography; culture, acculturation, language, race, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, and social exclusion significantly influence overall health status as well.⁴ These factors tend to be interrelated and contribute to disparities among, as well as within, groups.

Why address the social determinants of health?

Creating a framework that incorporates the social determinants of health can provide a more complete picture of why people become ill initially, and, moreover, what it will take to restore their health. It recognizes the value of equity and social justice as essential to staying healthy and accessing quality health care. Policy changes to alleviate the social determinants of health, such as poverty, racism, violence and access to resources, can have a far reaching impact on improving the health of a community, state or county. Addressing only the symptoms of illness and ignoring its root cause will not improve population health.

Facts at a glance

- Approximately 3.5 million individuals are homeless in America.⁵
- In the U.S., 44 million people are living in poverty and 41.3 million are using food stamps.⁶
- Children living in poverty are seven times more likely to have poor health than children in higher income households.⁷
- With a prison population of 2.3 million, we now have the highest rate of incarceration in the world.⁸
- Approximately 30 percent of LGBT youth report having been physically abused by family members because of their sexual orientation, gender identity or expression.⁹
- LGB individuals had a 1.5 times higher risk for depression and anxiety disorders over a period of 12 months or a lifetime than heterosexual individuals.¹⁰
- African Americans are 30 percent more likely to report having serious psychological distress than non-Hispanic Whites.¹¹
- In 2007, Hispanics were 3 times more likely to be uninsured than non-Hispanics.¹²
- American Indians and Alaska Natives have an infant death rate 40 percent higher than the rate for Caucasians.¹³
- American Indian/Alaska Native adults were 2.3 times as likely as white adults to be diagnosed with diabetes.¹⁴
- In 2006, adults with less than a high school degree were 50 percent less likely to have visited a doctor in the past 12 months compared to those with a bachelor's degree.¹⁵
- Only 33 percent of disadvantaged fourth-graders are proficient readers at grade level.¹⁶
- Poor Mexican-American children ages 2 to 9 have the highest proportion of untreated decayed teeth (70.5 percent), followed by poor non-Hispanic black children (67.4 percent).¹⁷

¹Robert Wood Johnson Foundation. <http://www.rwjf.org/vulnerablepopulations/product.jsp?id=42029>

²WHO (2010). Social determinants of health. Retrieved from http://www.who.int/social_determinants/en/

³Evans, G., & Kantrowitz, E. (2002). Socioeconomic status and health: The potential role of environmental risk exposure. *Annual Review of Public Health*, 23, 303-31.

⁴Situational Analysis: Issues of Relevance in Designing a National Strategy to Promote Mental, Emotional, and Behavioral Health and to Prevent/Reduce Mental Illness and Substance Use Disorders. D. Shern, S. Steverman, E. Ahmed, & P. Shea. National Association of State Mental Health Program Directors, 2011. Page 6.

⁵National Coalition for the Homeless. (2009). How many people experience homelessness? Retrieved from http://www.nationalhomeless.org/factsheets/How_Many.html

⁶DeNavas-Walt, C., Proctor, B.D., & Smith, J.C. (2010). Income, poverty, and health insurance coverage in the United States: 2009. U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Reports, P60-238. Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office. Retrieved from <http://www.census.gov/prod/2010pubs/p60-238.pdf>

⁷Situational Analysis: Issues of Relevance in Designing a National Strategy to Promote Mental, Emotional, and Behavioral Health and to Prevent/Reduce Mental Illness and Substance Use Disorders. Op. cit.8ibid. Page 7.

⁹<http://minorityhealth.hhs.gov/>

¹⁰http://books.nap.edu/openbook.php?record_id=13128&page=206

¹¹<http://minorityhealth.hhs.gov/>

¹²<http://www.cdc.gov/nccdphp/dach/chhep/index.htm>

¹³<http://minorityhealth.hhs.gov/>

¹⁴<http://minorityhealth.hhs.gov/templates/browse.aspx?vl=3&lvld=26>

¹⁵<http://www.cdc.gov/nccdphp/dach/chhep/index.htm>

¹⁶<http://www.cdc.gov/nccdphp/dach/chhep/index.htm>

¹⁷<http://www.ahrq.gov/research/dentalcare/dentria.htm>





ADDRESSING THE SOCIAL DETERMINANTS OF HEALTH

Who should address social determinants of health?

Social determinants of health should be addressed by groups of all different kinds, including but not limited to:

- Policy Makers
- State Health Directors
- Communities

Language of Social Determinants

Health	a state of complete physical, mental, and social well-being and not just the absence of illness
Social Exclusion	a multidimensional process of progressive social rupture, detaching groups and individuals from social relations and institutions and preventing them from full participation in the normal, normatively prescribed activities of the society in which they live
Oppression	the exercise of authority or power in a burdensome, cruel, or unjust manner
Acculturation	cultural modification by an individual, group or community by adapting to or borrowing traits from another culture
Social Gradient	the extent of the difference in wealth and opportunity between those with the most and those with the least
Structural Racism	the differential access to the goods, services, and opportunities of society. Generally, there is no sole, true identifiable perpetrator; when racism is built into the institution, it appears as the collective action of the population
Social Capital	the fabric of a community and the community pool of human resources available
Income Inequality	unequal distribution of household or individual income across the various participants in an economy
Health Inequity	a difference or disparity in health outcomes that is systematic, avoidable, and unjust
Health Disparities	differences in health outcomes between groups that reflect social inequalities
Health Literacy	whether a person can obtain, process, and understand basic health information and services that are needed to make appropriate health decisions; also requires complex group of reading, listening, analytical, and decision-making skills

Key Messages for Everyone

- Social determinants of health are the primary determinants regarding whether individuals stay healthy or become ill
- The larger the gap in health disparities, the more the overall health status of entire populations is reduced
- The larger the difference in health status between the healthiest and least healthy in a community the lower the overall health status of the population.
- Assess the community with the community using a community-based participatory approach (community engagement)
- Significant health inequalities persist among and within minority groups
- Equity & social justice are the cornerstones of health

Tips for Policymakers

1. Lawmakers should consider the impact of social determinants of health as a framework when developing policies.
2. Public policies should be developed that promote equitable access to important social and material resources.
3. Policies that promote social inclusion and acceptance of diverse communities should be pursued.
4. Consider the social determinants of health as a guide for the development of policies for behavioral health prevention that call for multi-agency partnerships or collaboration.
5. Key decision-makers can use this information to coordinate with foundations and other stakeholders in identifying solutions.

Tips for State Health Directors

1. Encourage state public health departments to partner with their state behavioral health program directors to guide implementation of evidence-based programs using the social determinants of health (e.g., parks, other recreational areas, the Good Behavior Game, et al).
2. Incorporate behavioral health into a broader public health state plan using social determinants of health to guide the drafting of the plan. The social determinants can be used as a frame of reference to get behavioral health folded into broader public health goal(s) of states.
3. To facilitate and provide support to the state health directors working with other agencies to be cognizant regarding the impact of the social determinants of health.
4. Address unequal access to health care in all aspects of policy including:
 - Location of clinical facilities
 - Culturally appropriate outreach to populations who are known to underutilize health care
 - Assure that lower income first-time mothers have access to a visiting nurse service
5. Educate political leadership regarding the importance of addressing problems of poverty, racism and social exclusion for the health and productivity of the population.
6. Reach out to the leadership of other components of state government to address the multiple social determinants (education, safe housing, healthful food) known to drive population health.

Tips for Communities

1. Raise awareness of the importance of the social determinants of health and their impact on individuals and communities.
2. Pursue policies to assure that healthful food, safe housing and living wages are available to everyone in the community.
3. Support community activities to build social networks among individuals who represent differing racial or ethnic groups.