

# Natural Pathways to Wellbeing



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# Disclosures

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## **Gyll Turteltaub, PsyD**

Has no financial relationships to disclose.

Views expressed are my own and do not represent Kaiser Permanente or any affiliated organization.

## ● THE SCIENCE OF WELLBEING

*For most of psychology's history,  
the focus was on what goes wrong.*

Around 2000, a different question emerged:

### **What helps people flourish?**

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Since 2000: over 100,000 peer-reviewed studies  
Measurable · Learnable · Clinically consequential

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*Pursuing your own wellbeing is not self-indulgent. It is evidence-based health promotion.*

*Physician distress correlates with medical errors, reduced empathy, and adverse outcomes.*



# What Happiness Actually Is — and Why It Matters

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## What happiness actually is:

- **Frequent positive emotions** — not constant cheerfulness
- **A deep sense that life is good and meaningful**
- **A learnable skill** — not a personality trait or stroke of luck
- **Emotional flexibility** — the capacity for joy AND difficulty

## What happier people experience:

Better health & longer life · Stronger relationships · Greater creativity & clinical performance ·  
Faster recovery from adversity · Better diagnostic accuracy & more empathic care

# What Determines Lasting Wellbeing?

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**50%**

## **Genetic Set Point**

Your biological baseline —  
relatively fixed

**10%**

## **Life Circumstances**

Income, location, title —  
far less than we expect

**40%**

## **Intentional Activity**

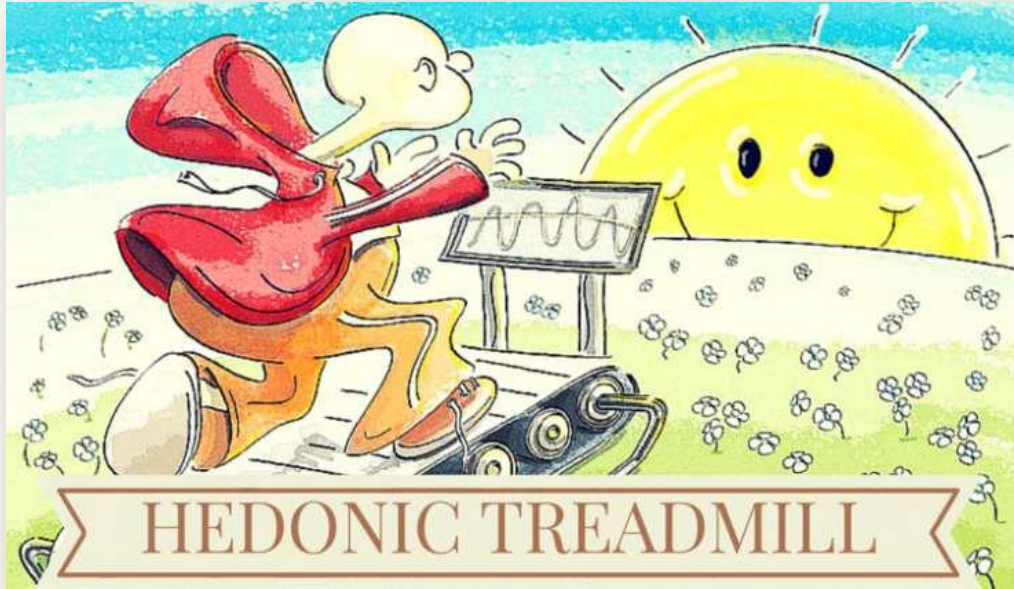
What you choose to do,  
think, and practice — your  
greatest lever

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*40% is within your direct control. That is an enormous opportunity!*



“I’ll be happy when I...”



Finish training · Get promoted · Reach the next milestone

*Temporary boost. Adaptation. Reset.*

*In medicine — where achievement is the entire culture — contentment can remain perpetually just out of reach.*

# What Actually Drives Lasting Wellbeing

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*Less than we think:*

Income, possessions, and status · Job title and professional recognition

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## What reliably works:

- **Meaning and purpose** in life and work
  - **Genuine connection** and contribution
  - **Presence** and intentional practice
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*External achievements have a surprisingly small and temporary impact. What endures is meaning, connection, and intentional presence — available right now.*



# A Prescription for Wellbeing

What helps us recover, reconnect, and thrive



Evidence-based. Mostly Free. Available today

## ● GROWTH MINDSET

Physicians with a growth orientation have lower burnout and higher clinical engagement

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**Fixed:** Treats challenges as threats

**Growth:** Treats challenges as information





SOME DAY,  
WE WILL ALL DIE,  
SNOOPY!

TRUE,  
BUT ON ALL THE  
OTHER DAYS,  
WE WILL NOT.

# The Healing Power of Laughter

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**1/5**

## Recurrent Heart Attacks

Cardiac rehab patients watching 30 min/day of self-chosen humor had one-fifth the recurrence rate vs. controls

**↓ BP**

## Blood Pressure

Regular laughter lowers systolic BP measurably — with effects comparable to some antihypertensives

**40%**

## Laugh Less in Adversity

Of coronary patients — exactly when humor is most protective, we suppress it most

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*Humor is not a distraction from healing. It is an active mechanism of it.*

# The Power of Joyful Expression

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- **Singing releases endorphins** and activates the vagus nerve — lowering heart rate and anxiety
  - **Even 5 minutes of music** measurably shifts mood and lowers cortisol
  - **Playfulness in clinical teams** is associated with psychological safety and lower burnout
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*Small, joy-filled moments compound into meaningful wellbeing over time.*

*The simplest human pleasures are often the most powerful medicines.*



## ● SLEEP & RECOVERY

# Recovery Is Not Wasted Time

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**20 min**

Enhanced memory, alertness,  
and reaction time

**30 min**

Increased cytokine production  
— stronger immunity

**60 min**

Lower cortisol, higher serotonin

**1–2×/wk**

48% lower risk of cardiovascular  
events

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*Rest is the mechanism that makes performance sustainable. Not a luxury. A strategy.*

## NATURE & MOVEMENT

# Nature's Wellness Wonders

*Patients with window views of nature recovered faster, needed fewer pain meds, and had shorter hospital stays. Same care. Same procedures. A window made the measurable difference.*

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- Nature exposure lowers cortisol and restores directed attention
- Benefits from 15-min walk, sunlight, or proximity to water
- We are neurologically adapted to natural environments — deprivation has costs



● THE HEALING POWER OF PETS

## The Healing Power of Pets

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- **Lower blood pressure, cholesterol, and cortisol** in pet owners
  - **Increased oxytocin** — same bonding hormone as human connection
  - **Reduced loneliness** and improved immune function
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## ● MOVEMENT

# The Most Evidence-Based Antidepressant

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- **Multiple RCTs: exercise matches antidepressants** in treating mild-to-moderate depression
  - **A 10-min walk** measurably lowers cortisol and improves cognitive performance
  - **Both cardio & strength training** reduce burnout and improve emotional regulation
  - **The goal:** consistent, sustainable movement — not optimization
- 



*Movement is one of the most effective natural antidepressant we have — and the most under-prescribed.*



## Chocolate: The Sweetest Medicine (in moderation)

- Dark chocolate · Fiber, iron, magnesium, polyphenols, and flavanols
- Lowers BP · Reduces heart disease risk · Enhances cognition · Boosts serotonin & endorphins

# The Power of Prosocial Spending

*We assume that spending money on ourselves should increase our happiness. The research says otherwise.*

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**\$5** Giving to others reliably boosts the giver's wellbeing more than equivalent self-purchases

**More** Windfall recipients who give money away report greater happiness than those who keep it

**Why** Contribution activates meaning — a more durable wellbeing source than pleasure

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● CONNECTION

# Our Most Powerful Health Resource

*Social isolation is as harmful as smoking*

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- **Close relationships** are the #1 predictor of health and longevity
  - **Strong social ties** reduce stress hormones and lower rates of heart disease and depression
  - **Quality of connection** matters more than quantity or relationship status
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## ● GRATITUDE

# Attitude of Gratitude

### Gratitude is associated with:

- Greater resilience under stress
- Stronger relationships
- Greater wellbeing

### The practice:

*Notice it.*

Pause long enough to recognize what is sustaining you.

*Express it.*

Tell people the impact they have on your life.

***Gratitude doesn't deny hardship.***

***It redirects attention toward what is still sustaining.***



## ● ALTRUISM

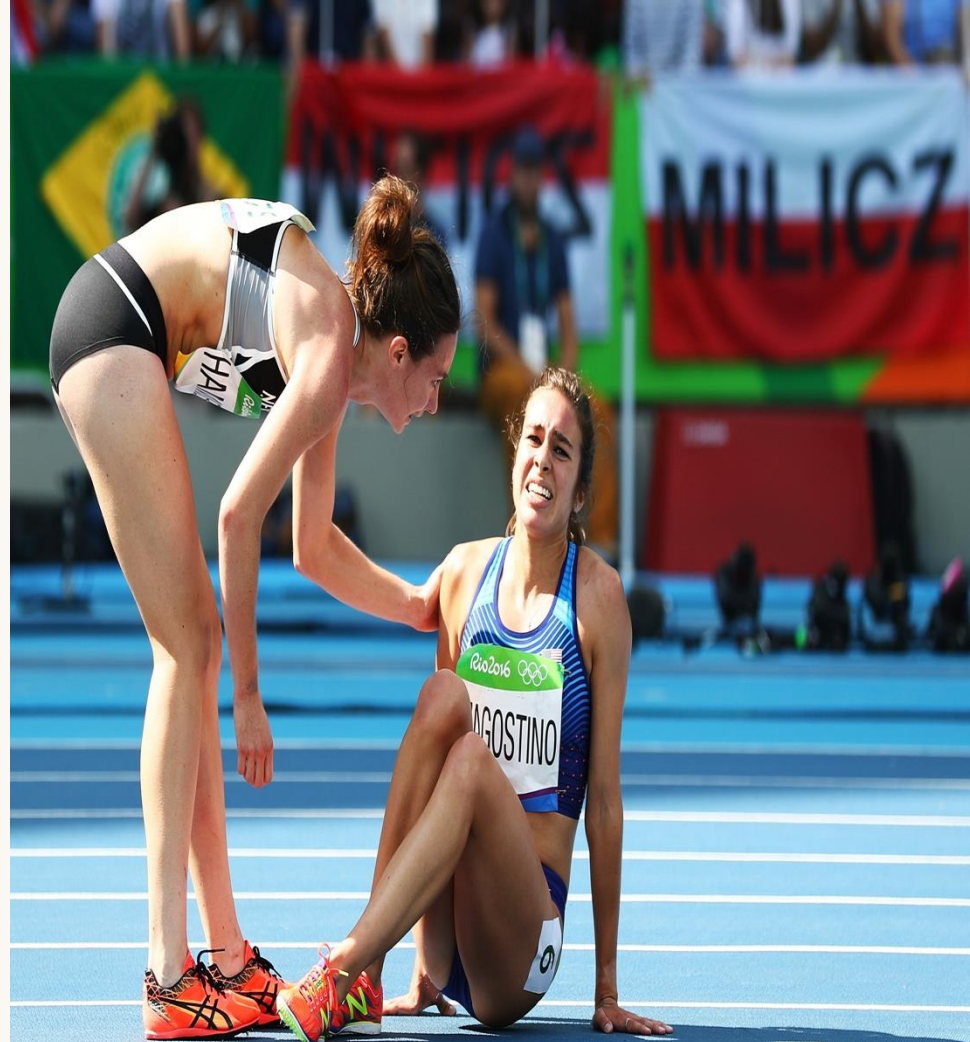
# The Feel-Good Factor

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*Two strangers collided in the Olympics. One stopped to help — at the cost of her own medal. Both were celebrated as the most memorable athletes of those Games — not for their times, but for their humanity.*

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- Helping others boosts health, immunity, and longevity
- Kindness activates the same neural reward pathways as receiving
- Contribution is a more durable wellbeing source than achievement



# Mindfulness is not only a stress tool. It is a wellbeing builder.

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- Intentional attention, practiced consistently, changes brain structure and emotional baseline.
- The smallest consistent practice changes how we experience our days.

*“The present moment is the only time over which we have dominion.”*

- Thich Nhat Hanh

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## THE PLEASURE PRESCRIPTION

*Connect with others — including your pet.  
Sing. Express gratitude. Be kind. Eat dark  
chocolate in nature. Alternate with napping,  
meditating, and giving away money.*

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# Before You Leave: Choose ONE

*One small, specific, sustainable practice — starting this week.*

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- 1 One mindset reframe** I will practice this week

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  - 2 One relationship** I will invest in this month

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  - 3 One daily pleasure** I will allow — guilt-free

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  - 4 One act of gratitude** or kindness — small and specific

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  - 5 A moment of stillness** — even 60 seconds

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  - 6 One form of movement** I will protect
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A dirt road with tire tracks leads towards a bright sunset over a green field. The sun is low on the horizon, creating a golden glow and long shadows. The sky is filled with scattered clouds, some dark and some lit by the sun. The overall scene is peaceful and evocative of a journey or path.

*The path is the practice*