

Importance of Overall Wellness

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A recent survey showed the most popular 2024 New Year's resolutions among adults who have made one or more. As usual, losing weight, eating healthier, and exercising more were part of that list. Those are all a good start, but overall health and wellness is a combination of MANY factors, NOT just your weight, the foods you eat, or how much you exercise. So if you'd like to focus more on improving your overall wellness, then READ ON!

Let's dig a little deeper into what exactly overall wellness is and what exactly these wellness goals would look like. First off, wellness looks different for everyone as each person has a unique set of values and needs. However, there are 4 key areas of lifestyle that are considered dimensions of overall wellness:

1. **Physical wellness** refers to your bodily health and is at the core of proper human functioning. Nutrition, sleep hygiene, self-care rituals, and exercise all fit into this category.
2. **Emotional wellness** reflects your state of mind. Understanding your emotions and behaviors, sitting with feelings, and addressing challenges like depression and anxiety all comprise this wellness type.
3. **Spiritual wellness** means tapping into the beliefs that guide your existence, and these thoughts don't have to be religious. Meditation, pondering ethics and ideals, and mindfulness can all be part of your spiritual wellness journey.
4. **Social wellness** is the positive feeling of connecting with others. Not only extroverts experience this kind of wellness! Social wellness might mean attending a party with extended family for some and for others, it may be as simple as sharing highlights from their day with their partner.

Now that you understand a bit more about what overall wellness is, wellness goals would be specific objectives related to these key areas of your life. Examples of some physical wellness goals would look as follows:

- **Get better sleep.** Adults need around 8 hours of sleep daily. If you feel flighty or constantly need a nap, you're likely not getting enough sleep. Help improve your sleep by creating a nightly wind-down routine and setting daily goals: for example, light stretching, drinking tea, or journaling. Possibly improve your sleep quality by installing blackout curtains or wearing an eye mask, turning off your phone, and snoozing with earplugs.
- **Practice intuitive eating.** If you're looking to revamp your food outlook and consume more intentionally, aim to eat intuitively. Intuitive eating teaches you to have a meal or snack when you're hungry (instead of when your schedule or diet dictates), respect your body, and feel full. By setting a goal to eat more intuitively, you can change bad habits like restricting or binging, boost your nutritional intake, and get more enjoyment from your food.

Here are some examples of emotional wellness goals to get you started:

- **Journal daily.** Journaling is a multi-beneficial activity that requires only a pen and paper. Write down what happened in your day without filtering anything, and explore your emotions on the page. It makes you more self-aware, helping you understand why you react or feel a certain way. Making these observations can help you control future behaviors, understand the need for boundaries, and decrease anxiety. Also, journaling is an act of meditation. It can pull you out of the spiral of a stressful day and recenter your thoughts.
- **Take social media breaks.** A recent study I read suggests that social media can negatively impact emotional health, causing depression and anxiety. Social media can also push people to

compete and compare themselves instead of fostering self-love. Set a goal to reduce your social media usage by a certain number of minutes daily. Alternatively, consider taking a more extensive social media break to reset, like trying to go a week without posting or viewing anything. You may sense an uptick in mood and enjoy more time for rewarding activities, like catching up with a friend or reading.

Here are a couple of spiritual goals to add to your wellness plan:

- **Spend more time in nature.** No matter your belief system, you can find joy in nature. Spending time outside has been shown to boost cognition and mental health. By stepping away from your workspace and into the park, you gain a much-needed break and an opportunity to refocus your attention. Just remember, attention restoration drives stress reduction!!
- **Practice mindfulness.** Just like refocusing on nature can reduce stress, staying in the present with mindful meditations can reduce anxiety and depression. Focusing on the moment may lower your blood pressure, improve sleep, and even help you manage pain. Aim to perform a breathing exercise twice a day or to use a relaxation technique, like body-scan meditation, every night before you go to bed.

Here are a few examples of some social wellness goals that may start you in the right direction: ●

Have more meaningful conversations. Idle 'chat' and superficial conversations can be numbing.

On the other hand, more meaningful conversations allow people to learn about themselves, the world, and others' views and these 'deeper' interactions help you feel seen and forge deeper bonds. Aim to have one deep conversation daily — whether you have a wellness-boosting interaction with a coworker or check up on a loved one.

- **Add a social event to your week.** Loneliness can become a loop. At first, you hanker for more social connection. Then, chronic loneliness sets in, becoming a habitual part of your daily schedule. Break the cycle by upping your social interactions by one weekly event. And the event doesn't have to be a big party — take a walk with a friend, chat with the barista at your coffee shop, or catch up with a family member.
- **Volunteer.** Volunteering may not be the first activity that comes to mind when you think of helping yourself. However, assisting others is an excellent way to make new social connections and gain a greater sense of purpose!!

Like all goals, these wellness challenges also should be reasonable and measurable, yet demanding enough to motivate you but still within your grasp. And you should have the means to track your progress toward them! In the end, overall wellness goals should leave you feeling happier, healthier, and more fulfilled. Remember, overall wellness is the act of practicing healthy habits on a daily basis to attain better physical and mental health outcomes, so that instead of just surviving, you're *thriving*.