

# The 8 Dimensions of Wellness: Where Do You Fit In?

May 27, 2016 • Contributed by Marjie L. Roddick, MA, NCC, LMHC

What does wellness look like to you? When you envision someone who is “well” and “healthy,” what comes to mind? What factors do you think influence wellness?

The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) has identified eight dimensions of wellness to focus on to optimize health. The eight dimensions include: emotional, spiritual, intellectual, physical, environmental, financial, occupational, and social. Wellness can be compromised by lack of support, trauma, unhelpful thinking styles, chronic illness/disability, and substance use. The eight dimensions are described below and are accompanied by examples and ideas for improving each area.

## 1. EMOTIONAL

SAMHSA identifies emotional wellness as an ability to cope effectively with life and build satisfying relationships with others. People with healthy emotional wellness feel confident, in control of their feelings and behaviors, and are able to handle life challenges. Working through life challenges can build resiliency as we learn that setbacks can be overcome. Emotional health can be maintained or improved by engaging in regular leisure and recreational activities. Do activities that involve each of your senses: smell, taste, touch, sight, and sound. Listen to music, eat your favorite food, light your favorite candle, play with your pet, and watch your favorite movie or the sunset.

## 2. SPIRITUAL

Spiritual wellness is related to your values and beliefs that help you find meaning and purpose in your life. Spiritual wellness may come from activities such as volunteering, self-reflection, meditation, prayer, or spending time in nature. Signs of strong spiritual health include having clear values, a sense of self-confidence, and a feeling of inner peace. To improve your spiritual health, it can help to create a quiet space for solitude and contemplation or a place of curiosity and playfulness. Maintaining a playful, curious attitude can help you find experiences that offer hope, purpose, and meaning.

## 3. INTELLECTUAL

Intellectual wellness is when you recognize your unique talents to be creative and you seek out ways to use your knowledge and skills. When you foster your intellectual wellness, you participate in activities that cultivate mental growth. Reading, doing challenging puzzles such as crosswords or Sudoku, debating issues with others who have opposing viewpoints, learning a new language or musical instrument, trying a new hobby, or teaching and tutoring others are

all ways to maintain or improve your intellectual wellness. When you challenge yourself to learn a new skill, you are building your intellectual health. People who pay attention to their intellectual wellness often find that they have better concentration, improved memory, and better critical thinking skills.

#### **4. PHYSICAL**

Physical wellness is affected by physical activity, healthy nutrition, and adequate sleep. There are many examples of physical activity that range in levels of intensity from light to vigorous. Maintaining your physical health can include yoga, bike riding, jumping rope, engaging in sports, running, walking, jogging, skiing, dancing, tennis, and gardening. Many people use smoking as a coping tool. Unfortunately, this method of coping can lead to a number of physical health problems, including heart disease and cancer, and can increase one's chances of premature death. SAMHSA states that smoking-related illnesses are related to half of all deaths for people diagnosed with a behavioral health condition.

#### **5. ENVIRONMENTAL**

Environmental wellness is related to the surroundings you occupy. This dimension of health connects your overall well-being to the health of your environment. Your environment, both your social and natural surroundings, can greatly impact how you feel. It can be hard to feel good if you are surrounded by clutter and disorganization, or if you feel unsafe in your environment. Pollution, violence, garbage buildup, and water conservation are some of the factors affecting environmental wellness. Ways to manage environmental wellness include creating neighborhood watches, recycling, planting a personal or community garden, purchasing products with minimal packaging, avoiding littering, and conserving energy and water by turning off lights and water when not in use.

#### **6. FINANCIAL**

Financial wellness is a feeling of satisfaction about your financial situation. Finances are a common stressor for people, so being able to minimize worry about this aspect of your life can enhance your overall wellness. Options for managing financial wellness include having a household budget, starting a savings account and adding to it every month even if it is just a small amount, saving some of your income in an emergency account, cutting back or limiting unnecessary expenses, avoiding credit card debt, donating to a meaningful charity, shopping at thrift stores, utilizing the library for free books and DVDs, and cooking your own meals instead of dining out. Try tracking your spending for a month to see where your money is going and set goals based on what you find.

## 7. OCCUPATIONAL

Occupational wellness is a sense of satisfaction with your choice of work. Occupational wellness involves balancing work and leisure time, building relationships with coworkers, and managing workplace stress. An occupational wellness goal might include finding work that is meaningful and financially rewarding. Finding work that fits with your values, interests, and skills can help maintain occupational wellness. Consider your office culture and determine how supported you feel; if you discover you feel a lack of support, seek out support from others close to you and be sure to engage in recreational activities that can help balance out work stress.

## 8. SOCIAL

Social wellness is a sense of connectedness and belonging. The social dimension of health involves creating and maintaining a healthy support network. Building a healthy social dimension might involve asking a colleague or acquaintance out for lunch, joining a club or organization, setting healthy boundaries, using good communication skills that are assertive rather than passive or aggressive, being genuine and authentic with others, and treating others in a respectful way.

What dimensions do you feel are your strongest? What areas would you like to work on? If you have areas you would like to improve, seeking out support can be helpful, whether it's from a friend, family member, or counselor. What would life be like if you optimized all eight dimensions? Setting goals for yourself in each area can help you feel more fulfilled and optimize your health.