

Heart and Soul: Wellness for the Mind and Body

Do you want to maintain wellness to the best of your ability over your lifetime? Then you must consider every aspect of your health—body, mind and spirit—and make choices that increase your chances of wellness.

The total package

Try to see yourself as a complex being where your thoughts, emotions and body, down to your very cells, work together to form your unique picture of wellness. You're bound to know firsthand how a disturbing thought can make your heart race or how lack of sleep can make you feel blue. Attending to the health of *all* systems is necessary for optimum wellness.

The body

No one gets a guarantee against cancer, heart disease and other illnesses. But by taking the best possible care of your body, you can reduce the risk of some diseases and strengthen it to fight against others.

Establish a regular relationship with your doctor. He can assess your medical history, tell you what preventive screenings you need and when and suggest ways to manage any chronic conditions you might have. You should also tell your doctor all of your health concerns.

Also be sure to:

- **Eat right**—Follow the USDA Food Guide Pyramid or the Mediterranean Pyramid.
- **Drink plenty of water.**
- **Maintain a healthy weight**—Consult your doctor for your recommended weight.
- **Exercise regularly**—with aerobic activity, strength training and stretching.
- **Get sufficient sleep**—Most people need six to eight hours each day.
- **Relax**—Teach your body to breathe deeply and loosen your muscles daily.

Those are the basics, but you might also need to make some important changes such as these:

- Limit your alcohol use.
- Use caffeine products moderately.
- Quit smoking.
- Give up recreational drug use.

The mind

It's possible to get perfect scores at the doctor's office and strive to take good care of your body, only to feel less than well. Why is this? Perhaps you are neglecting the needs of another important health component—your mind. Is it running faster than you are or bogged down with negative attitudes? Maybe it's overwhelmed by the amount of "no-fun" tasks

you pile onto it daily, with no breaks for playing, leisure, hobbies, etc. Notice your thoughts: What is the overall tone of your thinking—is it negative or positive? Looking on the bright side improves your total health.

You can also nurture your mind with:

- **Stress management**—Learn how to let go of worry and *literally* let go of excess work.
- **Continual learning**—Exercise your brain by taking a new class or learning new skills or hobbies.
- **Play**—Feed your mind daily doses of humor, recreation and special interests.
- **Social support**—Regular time with friends is vital to your health.

If your thoughts remain negative no matter what you do or if you notice confusion, persistent memory problems or anything else that seems out of the ordinary, consult your doctor. You might need his intervention to help restore your mind's health.

The spirit

Dr. Edmund Bourne, author of *The Anxiety and Phobia Workbook*, asserts that everyone needs to develop “meaning, purpose and spirituality” for complete wellness. You can set realistic goals for yourself to foster your need for purpose. The question of “meaning” might involve taking an honest look at what you are doing in your life to find satisfaction. You could:

- Write a personal mission statement.
- Keep a journal and record your values, goals and dreams of the future.
- Brainstorm ways you can help others or make a difference in your community.

What does it mean to have spiritual needs? You surely recognize your desire to love and be loved. That's the foundation of your greatest spiritual need. You also need to feel secure, protected, hopeful and trusting—needs that inspire many to seek out a “higher being.” Whether or not you believe in such a power, you might try some of these suggestions to nurture your spirit:

- **Build a time of “stillness” into each day**, free from distractions, interruptions, etc.
- **Forgive**—Bitterness and resentment destroy your health.
- **Nurture your self-esteem.**
- **Accept change** and your inability to control all things.
- **Explore local places of worship.**
- **Pray.**

Resources

Aging Well: The Complete Guide to Physical and Emotional Health by Jeanne Y. Wei. John Wiley and Sons Inc., 2000.

Healthfinder
www.healthfinder.gov

The Women's Complete Wellness Book by Debra Judelson and Diana Dell (American Medical Women's Association). Golden Books Adult Publishing, 1998.

Sources: "Guidelines for Good Health" *IDEA Personal Trainer*, 2002; "Keeping Mentally Fit" *Intelihealth*, 2000; *The Anxiety and Phobia Workbook* by Edmund J. Bourne, PhD. New Harbinger Publications Inc., 1995; *Aging Well: The Complete Guide to Physical and Emotional Health* by Jeanne Y. Wei. John Wiley and Sons Inc., 2000; Healthfinder.gov; *The Women's Complete Wellness Book* by Debra Judelson and Diana Dell (American Medical Women's Association). Golden Books Adult Publishing, 1998.

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