

PERSONAL AND GENERAL WELLBEING

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What is wellbeing? Why does it matter to your health?

Wellbeing refers to the way we feel, how we function on a personal and social level, and how we evaluate our lives as a whole. Wellbeing refers to more than our sense of momentary happiness. It's about the degree to which we feel a sense of purpose and in control of our circumstances. It's also about our level of mental and physical health and how these dictate our overall health, longevity, lifestyle behaviours, sense of social connectedness and productivity. And, studies show that higher levels of psychological wellbeing may be linked with a reduced risk of mortality and disease.

In fact, the way in which each of us defines our sense of wellbeing is seen as so important that it's included in measures of national wellbeing by some countries.

Harvard University's Center for Wellness and Health Promotion describes wellbeing as a dynamic and fluid continuum, that is influenced by many interconnected dimensions.

These are:

Our emotional wellbeing

Emotional wellbeing involves recognising and accepting our thoughts and feelings and staying in tune with our emotions. Our level of emotional health helps us to cope with stress, improves our capacity for productivity at work, fosters better communication skills, a positive mood, healthy self-esteem, and helps us to realise our true potential.

Our environmental wellbeing

A sense of environmental wellbeing means feeling that we are connected to our community and the environment. It means feeling we are environmental stewards who have a responsibility to act in a way that promotes and sustains our environmental resources – by recycling, donating unwanted items to others, reducing our carbon footprint, eating locally grown fresh food and so on. Fostering our environmental wellbeing also means seeking out exposure to green spaces, such as walking in a park or garden and going into nature. These habits have also been associated with a lowered incidence of depression – particularly for those living in built-up, urban spaces.

Our financial wellbeing

This involves being mindful of our financial decisions, living within our means, differentiating between our needs and wants, and managing our short- and long-term financial goals.

Our intellectual wellbeing

Developing good physical and mental health requires time and deliberate, lifelong effort. Developing our intellectual wellbeing requires the same consistent effort, and time spent on activities that involve critical thinking and problem-solving, or that stimulate our curiosity and creativity. The benefits of these habits include improved cognition, concentration, memory and clearer thinking; experiencing a more stimulating life; developing our personal values and opinions as well as our open-mindedness.

Our physical wellbeing

Physical wellbeing includes not only our physical health but also our emotional, intellectual and relational wellbeing. It's a holistic approach to our physical wellbeing. A healthy body is the result of regular exercise, healthy eating, adequate sleep and other positive habits that improve energy and productivity, help in reducing stress and regulating our mood, in maintaining a healthy weight, and in improving memory and focus.

Our relational wellbeing

Relational wellbeing focuses on creating and maintaining meaningful relationships with other people, with groups and communities. Having supportive relationships can make you feel satisfied and secure.

Our spiritual wellbeing

Our levels of inner peace and harmony are linked to our spiritual wellbeing. Our spirituality develops from belief systems that provide for purpose and direction in our lives, including our faith, values, ethics and moral principles.

Our vocational wellbeing

Vocational wellbeing stems from balancing our life with a form of work that aligns to our personal skills and values. This occupation should fulfil us while challenging us to grow, learn and develop all the while giving us a feeling of meaning and purpose.

The power of Positive Psychology

Positive Psychology is the scientific study of the positive emotions and personal strengths that enable individuals and communities to thrive – those qualities that optimise our sense of wellbeing. At the heart of this science is a belief that people want to lead meaningful and fulfilling lives, to cultivate what is best within themselves, and to enhance their experiences of love, work, and play. Positive psychology is centred on specific traits that make up our experience of life optimal, such as:

- Having positive emotions
- Being satisfied with life
- Being optimistic
- Forgiving people
- Practising self-regulation
- Having meaning and purpose in life
- Volunteering and helping others
- Having good social relationships
- Having healthy levels of spiritual wellbeing

Positive Psychology suggests that living the good life involves more than avoiding or undoing problems. It focuses on developing our strengths in the face of challenges, rather than focusing only on what is wrong so that it can be 'fixed'.

Optimism and gratitude are significant components of Positive Psychology in practice

- Optimism is associated with:
 - Having healthier lifestyle habits
 - Better overall health:
 - Lower blood pressure
 - A lowered risk of chronic disease. When you regulate your emotions better, you have lower levels of inflammation in the body, decreasing your risk of heart attacks and premature death.
 - Better recovery from health setbacks, especially for older people
 - Gratitude is associated with:
 - A greater sense of happiness and optimism
 - Improved personal relationships as a result of cultivating a greater sense of positivity towards other people

Positive Psychology is designed to complement ongoing medical treatment and psychotherapy and aims to enhance the various components of our overall wellbeing. Interestingly, the field of Wellbeing Therapy tries to promote recovery from depression and other affective disorders by having a patient focus on and promote the positive, as well as alleviating negative aspects of life.



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