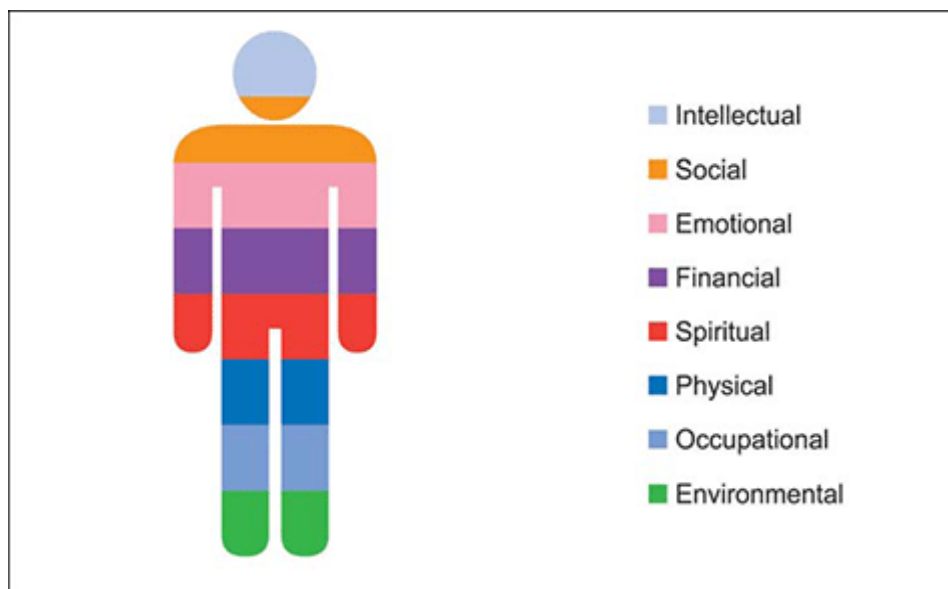


WELLNESS & MENTAL HEALTH

What is *Wellness*?

Wellness is a concept that embraces a way of living that helps all people enjoy a more satisfying, productive, and happy life. It is, by definition, a conscious, deliberate process that requires a person to become aware of and make choices for a more satisfying lifestyle. A *wellness lifestyle* is balanced; it includes cultivating healthy habits that contribute to a better quality of life.



Dimensions of *Wellness*

Intellectual: Recognizing creative abilities and finding ways to expand knowledge and skills

Social: Developing a sense of connection and a well-developed support system, which can be a tremendous resource for wellness

Emotional: Developing skills and strategies for being able to cope effectively with stress, challenges, and conflict

Financial: Feeling satisfied with current and foreseeable future financial situation

Spiritual: Exploring, respecting, and incorporating personal values, beliefs, and the awareness of a being or force that transcends the material life

Physical: Recognizing the need for physical activity, diet, sleep, and nutrition while discouraging the use of tobacco, drugs, and excessive alcohol consumption

Occupational: Deriving personal satisfaction and enrichment from participating in work, volunteering, and other activities that reflect personal values, interests, and beliefs

Environmental: Fostering good health by occupying pleasant, stimulating environments that support our well-being

Wellness means overall well-being. It incorporates many aspects of a person's life. Each dimension of wellness can affect overall quality of life, so it is important to consider all aspects of health.

This is especially important for people with mental health problems, because wellness directly relates to the quality and longevity of your life.

Did you know...?

People with serious mental illness (SMI) die, on average, 25 years earlier than the general population.

While suicide and injury account for about 30-40% of excess mortality, 60% of premature deaths are from natural causes similar to the leading causes of death found nationwide, including heart disease, cancer, and cerebrovascular, respiratory and lung diseases.

This means that while persons with serious mental illness do not have higher rates of these diseases, the death rate due to these medical conditions is about 2 to 3 times greater than for the general population.

The disparity in life expectancy is largely caused by a number of modifiable risk factors including:

- High rates of smoking; substance abuse; obesity, poor nutrition and lack of exercise; and “unsafe” sexual practices;

- Increased vulnerability due to poverty, social isolation, victimization/trauma, homelessness, unemployment and incarceration;
- Lack of coordination between mental and primary healthcare;
- Stigma and discrimination;
- Side effects from psychotropic medications, which can mask symptoms of medical illness, cause weight gain and cause metabolic syndrome—a combination of medical disorders that increase the risk of developing cardiovascular disease and diabetes; and an
- Overall lack of access to healthcare—particularly preventative care.

Moving Toward Wellness: Helping Yourself and Others

1. Eat well. Some prescribed medications make it difficult to lose weight. Here are some simple steps you can take to improve your diet:
 - Follow the Dietary Guidelines for Americans (available at: <http://www.mypyramid.gov/guidelines/index.html>), which emphasize fruits, vegetables, whole grains, and fat-free or low-fat milk and milk products; includes lean meats, poultry, fish, beans, eggs, and nuts; and is low in saturated fats, trans fats, cholesterol, salt (sodium), and added sugars.
 - Find new recipes and tools from trusted online resources such as the American Heart Association: <http://www.americanheart.org> and Mayo Clinic: <http://www.mayoclinic.com/health/healthy-recipes/RecipeIndex>.
2. Get active—and make it fun. Physical activity is a great way to lose weight, improve overall health, and prevent diseases. Find a hobby (e.g., hiking, bike riding, kayaking), play an indoor or outdoor sport (e.g., soccer, volleyball, basketball), or join a local health club or community center.
3. Take time for yourself. It is important to reflect on personal goals and life ambitions, as well as to allow time for recreational activities. Develop your intellectual wellness by reading, or relax by using deep breathing exercises and yoga.
4. Find a wellness partner. It is easier to make lifestyle changes if you have someone else with you on your journey. Consider talking with friends, family members, and consider joining a self-help group. Social encouragement can be an important factor in sustaining health-promoting behavior change.

5. Quit smoking. Smoking cessation may be the modifiable risk factor intervention that is likely to have the greatest impact on decreasing mortality.

Seventy-five percent of individuals with either addictions or mental illness smoke cigarettes as compared with 23% of the general population.

Americans with mental health problems represent an estimated 44.3 percent of the U.S. tobacco market.

Half of all deaths from smoking occur among patients with mental health problems.

There are many new programs specifically designed to help people stop smoking. Consider using a nicotine replacement therapy and/or joining a smoking cessation self-help group. Find resources at:

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention: Guide to Smoking Cessation Resources
http://www.cdc.gov/tobacco/quit_smoking/how_to_quit/index.htm

Smokefree.gov <http://smokefree.gov/>

The early mortality rates of people with serious mental health problems are unacceptable. People with mental health problems deserve to live lives that are as long and as healthy as other Americans. By pursuing wellness, we can highlight the importance of recovery from mental health problems and reduce the disparity in life expectancy.

Sources:

The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration's 10x10 Wellness Campaign, <http://www.10x10.samhsa.gov>

NOTE: The material in this document has been adapted from the content of the publications available on this website.

Morbidity and Mortality in People with Serious Mental Illness. National Association of State Mental Health Program Directors (NASMHPD), Medical Directors Council, October 2006.
www.nasmhpd.org