

# 10 Dimensions of Wellness for College Students

A practical, evidence-based guide for optimal health and well-being



THE OHIO STATE  
UNIVERSITY

OFFICE OF THE  
CHIEF WELLNESS OFFICER



National Consortium for Building  
Healthy Academic Communities

Edited by Bernadette Mazurek Melnyk, Susan Neale and Madelyn M. Carson





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**T**oday's generation of students has had to be adaptable and resilient as the COVID-19 pandemic changed their lives and challenged their well-being.

Meanwhile, another health crisis of epidemic proportions exists: sixty percent of Americans have a chronic disease and one out of four has multiple chronic conditions.

While environment, healthcare, and genetics all play a part in determining lifespan, population health studies support that lifestyle behavioral patterns are the largest predictor of premature death. Based on population health studies, we know that approximately 80% of chronic disease can be prevented with healthy lifestyle behaviors, such as physical activity, healthy eating, not smoking, limiting alcohol intake, practicing regular stress reduction, and sleeping at least 7-9 hours a night.

However, only an estimated 6.3% of the adult population engages in these behaviors.

As a student, you have a wonderful opportunity now to explore the 10 dimensions of wellness and build a foundation of new health habits that will last throughout your lifetime. Taking the time to learn good self-care now can positively affect your health and the quality of your life well into the future.

This practical guide will help you take better self-care by providing you with evidence-based strategies to achieve optimal health and well-being through a focus on the 10 dimensions of wellness. Today can be your January 1: make a resolution to make just one healthy lifestyle change that will lessen your odds of suffering from chronic disease or dying prematurely. It takes at least 30 to 66 days to make or break a new health habit, so stay consistent and persistent.. Step by step, you can change your health habits and build a future of wellness for yourself and those you love.

Warm and well regards,



**Bernadette Mazurek Melnyk, PhD, APRN-CNP, EBP-C, FNAP, FAANP, FAAN**

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**M**y generation of students had to be adaptable and resilient as the COVID-19 pandemic changed our lives and challenged our well-being. However, this was not the first significant shift our generation faced. Even before the pandemic, we had been part of a constantly evolving world, from growing up alongside the internet, to the cellphone being invented, to social media playing an integral part in our daily lives. Yet one thing never changes: the need for our own well-being.

This book will cover many recommendations and tips to improve your wellness; however, it is important to keep in mind that wellness looks different for each person. I hope you will never underestimate the power of learning and being present in the moment. You are in college not just to learn in the classroom, but to learn from new life experiences, to learn from others, and to learn how to be your own person.

The transition to college can be overwhelming, with an abundance of new information and decisions to be made. If you are feeling stressed, don't worry; you will find that college is also an exciting time for you to discover your interests, make new friends, and be a part of unique experiences. I highly recommend getting involved in organizations or clubs that fit your interests. You have probably heard that clubs and organizations are a good way to find friends, pursue a passion or build your resumé, but did you know that getting involved on campus can actually improve your well-being? An Ohio State survey found that nearly 80% of involved students said their campus activities helped them manage stress. They were also likely to feel improved confidence and a sense of belonging at their university. Whether it is joining a club, finding an on-campus job or participating in intramural sports, any involvement helps students create their sense of community on campus.

I hope this book is a first step in your journey to learning about yourself and your well-being during your time in college and beyond.

Be well,

**Maddie Carson**



Editors Bernadette Mazurek Melnyk, Susan Neale and Madelyn M. Carson





## Acknowledgements

Some of the articles in this booklet have been previously published in the *Ohio State Alumni Magazine*, including: “Practical tips for achieving emotional wellness” and “Social wellness: nurturing your relationships to optimize your well-being.”

Other articles have been revised and reprinted here that originally appeared in *American Nurse Today*. They have been reprinted with permission. Copyright © 2018 HealthCom Media. All rights reserved, AmericanNurseToday.com. These articles include: “9 dimensions of wellness,” “Physical wellness: a must for sustained energy,” “Getting financially fit,” “Intellectual well-being,” “Creative wellness,” “Career wellness,” “Environmental wellness,” and “Spiritual wellness.”

The 10 Dimensions of Wellness concept, including digital wellness, originated with The Ohio State University Student Wellness Center, Office of Student Life.





# 10 Dimensions of Wellness

By Bernadette Mazurek Melnyk, Susan Neale and Madelyn M. Carson

**I**magine living a life in which you are happy, healthy, and fully engaged. In this life, you're in optimal physical condition and free from illness, but there's so much more: you have a sense of purpose and are pursuing things for which you have a passion, you are in control of your finances, and you're energized and enjoying your studies. You feel a great connection to other people and to things larger than yourself. Your mind is sharp, and you enjoy a variety of adventures, from creative pursuits to enjoying nature, with friends or by yourself. You can express your emotions and cope with problems, or “character builders,” in healthy ways. You balance work and play, screen time and time to connect with friends and family. You don't worry a lot, both because you're living a fulfilled life and because you've found the joy of living in the present moment.

This is total wellness, in all of its 10 dimensions: physical, emotional, financial, spiritual, social, career, intellectual, creative, environmental and digital. These dimensions build on each other and support each other. Starting today, commit to taking just a little bit better care of yourself and making one small, healthy lifestyle change for the next 30 to 60 days. Even small changes can lead to big improvements in your health and well-being.

There's more to your health and well-being than just nutrition and exercise.

## The 10 dimensions

Wellness is multifaceted and interconnected. Engaging in physical activity, eating healthily, and taking precautions not to get sick are obvious components to wellness, but other areas also should be considered. For example, spiritual, emotional, and financial wellness play a role in your health and well-being. Each of the articles in this book focuses on one of the following 10 dimensions of wellness:

**Physical wellness:** Your physical wellness isn't limited to exercise; it includes healthy eating, proactively taking care of health issues that arise, and maintaining healthy daily practices. Four healthy behaviors can help you substantially reduce the risk for heart disease, diabetes, back pain, and many other chronic diseases:

- 30 minutes of physical activity at least five days a week.
- Limit alcohol intake if you drink to one standard drink a day; if you don't drink alcohol now, don't start.
- Don't smoke or use vaping products.
- Eat a healthy diet, which includes five fruits and vegetables a day.

In addition, you can reduce your risk for chronic disease even further by practicing daily stress reduction and sleeping at least seven hours a night. Maintaining a good sleep schedule will help your school performance and help you feel your best.

**Emotional wellness:** When you're emotionally well, you can identify, express, and manage your full range of feelings. If feelings become overwhelming or interfere with your concentration or functioning, seek help. When you feel stressed, down, or anxious, use cognitive-behavioral skills and mindfulness techniques to help keep the blues and anxiety at bay.

**Financial wellness:** Almost three in four Americans surveyed in a recent American Psychological Association study said they experience financial stress, which can affect people physically, emotionally, and psychologically, and result in unhealthy coping behaviors. Financial well-being includes being fully aware of your financial state and budget







as well as managing your money to achieve realistic goals. When you analyze, plan well, and take control of your spending, you can make significant changes in how you save, and ultimately how you feel.

**Intellectual wellness:** Just as a flexible body indicates physical health, a flexible mind indicates intellectual health. When you're intellectually healthy, you value lifelong learning, foster critical thinking, develop moral reasoning, expand worldviews, and engage in education for the pursuit of knowledge. Any time you learn a new skill or concept, attempt to understand a different viewpoint, or exercise your mind with puzzles and games, you're building intellectual well-being. Also, studies show that intellectual exercise may improve the physical structure of your brain to help prevent cognitive decline.

**Career wellness:** Many college students don't know what they want to do yet, and that's okay. Think of yourself as beginning your career exploration process now, and listen to what your heart and mind are telling you. Engaging in work that provides personal satisfaction and enrichment and is consistent with your values, goals, and lifestyle will keep you professionally healthy in the future.

**Social wellness:** Building a network of support based on interdependence, mutual respect, and trust with your friends, family, and coworkers leads to social wellness. Developing a sensitivity and awareness toward others' feelings is another feature of social wellness. Evidence shows that social connections not only help us deal with stress, but also keep us healthy.

**Creative wellness:** Creative wellness means valuing and participating in a diverse range of arts and cultural experiences to understand and appreciate your surrounding world. Expressing your emotions and views through the arts can be a great way to relieve stress. Don't let self-judgment or perfectionism get in the way of this important dimension of your wellness. Allow yourself creative freedom to doodle, dance, or sing without worrying about whether you're doing it well. Also, take time to appreciate others' creative efforts.



**Environmental wellness:** Being environmentally well means recognizing the responsibility to preserve, protect, and improve the environment and appreciating your connection to nature.

Environmental wellness intersects with social wellness when you work to conserve the environment for future generations and improve conditions for others around the world.

**Spiritual wellness:** You can seek spiritual wellness in many ways, including quiet self-reflection, reading, and open dialogue with others. For the spiritually well person, exploring the depth of human purpose, pondering human connectedness, and seeking answers to questions like, “Why are we here?” is okay. Spiritual wellness includes finding your purpose, being open to exploring your own beliefs and respecting others’ beliefs.

**Digital wellness:** The digital world affects your well-being, too. When you are digitally well, you consider the impact of your virtual presence and use of technology on your overall wellness by taking steps to create sustainable habits that support your values, goals, community, and safety. It’s important to disconnect on a regular basis to connect with family and friends.

What will you do in the next two to five years if you know you cannot fail?

## Take action

Now that you're thinking about your own well-being, take time to start a journal about your health and wellness. Awareness is the first step toward action. Write down how you're feeling physically, the stressors in your life, your dreams, what you'd like to accomplish, and how you'd like to feel a week, 6 months, and a year from now. Setting goals for your well-being can make a significant positive difference in your life and others' lives.

*What will you do in the next 2 to 5 years if you know you cannot fail?* Put the answer to that question somewhere you can see it every day. Evidence supports that people who write down their dreams and goals are more likely to achieve them. And keep this in mind: It takes 30 to 66 days to make or break a habit. Set one wellness goal for the next 30 days. Make it something that won't be too difficult to achieve. For example, if you currently engage in physical activity for 10 minutes three days a week, strive for 15 minutes three days a week.

The steps you take today to safeguard and improve your wellness can lead you on a journey to optimal health, well-being, self-discovery, and satisfaction. You'll help others around you, too. Be well.

## *A personal story—Bernadette Melnyk*

My mom sneezed and had a hemorrhagic stroke right in front of me when I was home alone with her at age 15. She had a history of headaches for well over a year for which she saw her physician a week before she died. She was diagnosed with hypertension and given a prescription for an antihypertensive medication, which my dad found in her purse after she passed. Maybe if she had filled that prescription and started taking the medication, her stroke could have been prevented. I suffered from post-traumatic stress, depression and anxiety for a couple of years and sorely missed having my mom around to see me graduate from high school and college and go on to have my three beautiful daughters.

I share this story to appeal to your emotions so that you will engage in healthy lifestyle behaviors and take better care of yourself. If you don't do it for yourself, do it so that you'll be around for the people who love you.

# Physical Wellness

## A must for sustained energy

By Bernadette Mazurek Melnyk and Susan Neale

### Take steps now to ensure your future good health

**D**o you feel too tired, stressed, overworked, or rushed to find time to take care of your physical well-being? You're not alone—many people struggle to work wellness into their busy lives, putting it off for another day when they might have more time. Evidence shows, though, that focusing on self-care now can have lasting positive effects on our long-term health and well-being. It's time to put aside the guilt and think about what you can do to enhance your health and well-being today.

If adopting a healthier lifestyle seems overwhelming, take heart. Even small changes can have a big positive effect on how you feel and how you take care of others.

### Let's start with your heart

Do college students need to worry about heart disease? Yes. Heart disease remains the number-one cause of death in both men and women. Heart attacks and strokes kill more women than all cancers combined. Hypertension (high blood pressure) can be present with no symptoms; people can appear healthy and then suffer a heart attack or stroke. Adopting heart-healthy behaviors now and getting regular screenings can help you avoid heart disease in your lifetime.

The new blood pressure (BP) guidelines from the American Heart Association (AHA) and American College of Cardiology define normal BP as less than 120/80 mm Hg, elevated BP as systolic BP between 120 and 129 and diastolic less than 80, stage one hypertension as systolic BP between 130 and 139 or diastolic between 80 and 89, and stage two hypertension as systolic BP at least 140 or diastolic at least 90. The AHA recommends getting your BP checked at every primary care visit or at least once every two years if it's lower than 120/80 mm Hg.





The good news is that 80% of cardiovascular disease and other chronic diseases are preventable with healthy lifestyle behaviors. Research has shown that people who engage in the following four behaviors have 66% less diabetes, 45% less back pain, 93% less depression, and 74% less stress:

1. Engage in 30 minutes of physical activity five days a week.
2. Eat five fruits and vegetables per day.
3. Don't smoke.
4. Limit alcohol intake if you drink to one standard drink a day; if you don't drink alcohol now, don't start.

### Sit less, get active

If getting more physical activity into your busy schedule sounds difficult, take time now to plan more movement into your day. A simple 30-minute walk every day is effective, and those minutes don't have to be all at once. If you can squeeze in two 15-minute walks before and after classes, you'll be doing your body a world of good.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommend 150 minutes of moderate-intensity aerobic exercise a week for adults for heart health and to protect bones from osteoporosis. High-impact, weight-bearing exercises such as dancing, running, and aerobics are the most effective, but low-impact, weight-bearing exercise such as walking or using an elliptical machine also helps.

### Get strategic about food

Busy schedules and exhausting or stressful days can lead to overeating or indulging in high-fat or high-carbohydrate foods that can make you feel tired shortly after eating them. Taking a few moments to rethink your eating strategy can make a big impact on your health.

Habit and convenience dictate many of our food choices. With a little planning, you can change those habits. Make a list of what you eat often, and then substitute healthier options. A good rule is to eat lightly and eat often. A healthy breakfast is important to fuel your body for the day; people who skip breakfast are more likely to overeat during the day. Midmorning and midafternoon small healthy snacks, such as a handful of almonds, can help sustain your energy throughout the day. (See *Boost your nutrition*, page 15.) Aim for at least 5 servings of fruit and vegetables a day.

## Be nicotine-free

E-cigarettes, also known as vapes, are marketed as “healthier than smoking,” but that doesn’t make them healthy. According to the CDC, 99% of vapes contain nicotine, at levels often higher than that found in cigarettes, although their packaging doesn’t always disclose it. Nicotine is highly addictive, making smoking and vaping hard to quit. Nicotine can also have damaging effects on the development of brain synapses in young people. Did you know that your brain continues to develop until about age 25? This is an excellent time in your life to protect your brain health by not smoking or vaping.

If you smoke or vape, make a plan to quit today! Good habits can help you quit unhealthy ones. For instance, moving, eating healthier, and reducing stress can help smokers and vapers quit. The American Lung Association recommends swimming, jogging, brisk walking, and other activities that don’t allow for smoking. Healthy snacks such as carrots, plain popcorn, and fresh fruit can be a good diversion. And learning new ways to relieve stress can help curb the urge to reach for nicotine products.

When trying to quit, remember the four Ds:

1. Delay until the craving to smoke passes.
2. Distract yourself.
3. Drink water to beat smoking cravings.
4. Deep breathe—it’s a quick and effective way to reduce the stress of early nicotine cessation.

## Don’t drink alcohol or limit it if you do

Alcohol intake is now linked to certain types of cancer, so if you don’t drink alcohol, don’t start. If you do, don’t drink more than one standard drink a day, which equals:

- A 12-ounce beer
- 5 ounces of wine or
- 1.5 ounces of distilled spirits



### Set SMART goals

To make changes that stick, start with SMART goals: **S**pecific, **M**easurable, **A**chievable, **R**ealistic, and **T**imebound. Write down your physical health goals in clear, specific language; for example, “walk 15 minutes each morning and night.” Start with small, realistic goals that you know you can achieve, and set specific time limits for them.

Your optimal health is good for others too. We’ve all heard the adage, “you can’t take good care of others unless you take care of yourself,” and there’s evidence to support it. Take good care of yourself; it will translate into optimal health and sustained energy, so that you can enjoy life more and have the energy you need to care for others.

### Make a plan for emergencies

Now that you are living on your own, make a wellness checklist to deal with emergencies before they happen. Locate your campus health and/or wellness center, counseling service and hospital. Make sure you also get a primary care provider. Find your local pharmacy and make sure your prescriptions have been transferred there before you need refills. Talk to friends and roommates about what you would do to support each other in the event of a medical emergency or sexual assault. See page 59 for national resources for sexual assault and other crises.

## *Three more healthy behaviors*

Adopt these behaviors to boost your immune system, reduce the risk of chronic disease, and stay healthy.

1. **Sleep well** Adults need at least seven hours of sleep a night. Insufficient sleep can cause cortisol release, which plays havoc on many of our body’s systems. Try establishing a regular bedtime routine, including some meditation, and turn off your laptop or TV at least an hour before your head hits the pillow.
2. **Beware of the chair** Population health studies show that if you sit for three or more hours a day, your cardiovascular risk goes up by 30%; sitting for 5 hours or more a day is comparable to smoking 1.25 packs of cigarettes a day. Take a recovery break at least every 50 minutes. Try walking meetings instead of sitting, and consider an adjustable standing desk.
3. **Get grounded** Taking just a few minutes for stress relief when you start to feel tense can make a big difference in your overall well-being. Five deep breaths, a few minutes of meditation, or a short walk may be all it takes to get grounded. Try the 4-7-8 breathing method: count to 4 as you breathe in, hold it for a count of 7, and exhale for a count of 8.

## *Boost your nutrition*

Small changes can have a big impact. Take these actions to boost your nutrition and physical wellness.

- Replace unhealthy snacks with healthy ones, such as carrots, apples or a handful of almonds.
- Substitute water for sugared drinks (a good goal is eight 8-ounce glasses of fluid a day).
- To lower sodium intake, eat fewer processed, frozen, or packaged foods, and avoid adding salt to food.
- Choose whole grains instead of white bread or white rice.
- Use olive oil for cooking. Look for flat cold-pressed olive oil to boost your high-density lipoproteins.
- Avoid trans fats.
- Check out [Choosemyplate.gov](https://www.choosemyplate.gov) for meal planning and healthy recipes.
- At parties, try the 80/20 rule: Eat 80% “healthy” foods and 20% “want” foods.
- Add one serving of antioxidant-rich fruits or vegetables a week to your routine.
- Keep some emergency protein (a small bag of nuts or a high-protein energy bar) in your backpack, desk, or car.

Focusing on self-care now  
can have lasting, long-term  
positive effects.

# Emotional Wellness

Cope with stress and improve your mood with these research-tested methods

By Bernadette Mazurek Melnyk and Susan Neale

**I**t's raining, you're running late, you can't find a parking space and you have to give a presentation in class. You can't often control the events that trigger anxiety or stress, but you can harness healthy ways to cope with stress and the negative emotions that can arise.

When you are emotionally well, you can identify, express and manage your full range of feelings. During times when you feel stressed, down or anxious, you can learn cognitive-behavioral skills that keep the blues and anxiety at bay. These skills are based on components of cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT), which is the gold standard evidence-based treatment for mild to moderate anxiety and depression.

As the Dalai Lama once said, “The suffering from a natural disaster we cannot control, but the suffering from our daily disasters we can.” When you learn to recognize the relationship between thinking, feeling and behavior, you can start to turn negative thoughts around to positive ones and feel better, even on that rainy day.





## Cognitive-behavioral skills building (CBSB) that helps

Evidence shows that a lot of our emotions come as reactions to our thoughts. Negative thoughts are often followed by feelings of anxiety, stress and depression. Negative thinking can also lead to unhealthy or unhelpful behaviors. This pattern is often referred to as the thinking, feeling and behaving triangle. There's a way to escape a negative thinking-feeling-behaving triangle, though, through monitoring your own thought patterns and putting a positive spin on them.

### What was I thinking?

The first step in CBSB is to learn to **catch your automatic negative or unhelpful thoughts**. When you feel your mood change for the worse, or when you feel physical symptoms of anxiety such as rapid heartbeat, headache, stomach ache and sweating, ask yourself, "What was I just thinking?" Many negative thoughts become automatic — like any other habit. We don't choose them; they just happen.

### Learn to recognize trigger or activating events

Let's say a car cuts you off in traffic. This activating event might provoke a negative automatic thought like, "That careless driver could have just caused a bad accident!" that sends your mood in a downward spiral. When you notice negative automatic thoughts, though, you can turn them around and rewrite them.

When your mood changes and you are feeling stressed, anxious, angry or depressed, check your thoughts by asking, "What was just going through my mind? Is this thinking helpful or true?" Chances are it is not, so change the script.

### Change the script

The next time a car cuts you off in traffic and you start to have a negative thought, you can turn it into a positive one, such as, “That person may be under a great deal of stress. Thankfully, I’m safe.” Changing the negative thought around to a positive one buffers you from feeling stressed and anxious. Remember: **catch, check and change your thinking to improve your mood.**

### Practice, practice, practice

At least 30 to 66 days is the time frame it usually takes to make or break a new habit, including the way you think. With time and practice, you can actually change your thinking in response to the stressors in your life, and that will change how you feel. For the next 30 to 60 days, try monitoring your thoughts in response to stressors. Keeping a journal of daily stressors, your thought patterns that follow and how you felt and behaved will help you in forming new patterns of thinking. See challenging circumstances as opportunities to practice.

### Mindfulness

Integrating mindfulness into your daily lifestyle will also help you regulate your emotions. It’s human nature to expend a lot of emotional energy worrying about things in the future that may not happen, or feeling guilty about things in the past we can’t change. However, if we focus on the present, we will worry less and experience less guilt. Try meditation, controlled breathing or other techniques to ground yourself in the present such as this easy exercise: chew a piece of gum and count how many chews it takes to lose its flavor. The book “The Present” by Spencer Johnson has great insights on staying in the moment.

# Catch, check and change your thinking to improve your mood.

## Dealing with tough emotions

The college years are great for making new friendships and growing emotionally. They can also include a lot of difficult emotions as students deal with homesickness, problems in friendships, dating and new relationships, break ups, and the highs and lows of exams, as well as questions about who they are, what they want to be, and where they fit in. While you are learning new things in class, you are also learning about how to navigate emotions and situations. Be patient and kind with yourself. It may help to keep a journal about how you are feeling and what you are going through. Difficult emotions can feel overwhelming, but they will pass in time. Remember that it's okay to talk about your feelings and ask for help if you need it. You are not alone: there are many people going through the same thing right there with you.

## *Evidence for a healthy lifestyle*

You may have heard that four healthy behaviors can reduce risk for diabetes, heart disease, back pain, and a host of other physical health issues. Evidence shows they also reduce risk of depression by 93 percent and stress by 74 percent.

1. Get 30 minutes of exercise at least 5 days a week.
2. Adults over the age of 21 should limit alcohol use to one drink a day, but if you don't drink now, don't start!
3. Don't smoke or use vaping products
4. Eat a healthy diet including 5 fruits and vegetables a day.
5. Reduce your risk for chronic disease even further by practicing daily stress reduction and sleeping at least seven hours a night.



## More than just the blues

If symptoms of anxiety, stress or depression persist for more than two weeks and interfere with your concentration or daily functioning, don't wait. Seek help from a qualified therapist or your healthcare provider. Find counselling resources on campus before you need them so that you know where they are if you do. It is a strength to recognize when you need help, not a weakness.

## More tips for emotional wellness

- Identify your main stressors and make a plan for how to deal with them.
- Manage your energy: build in frequent recovery breaks throughout the day. Sit less, stand more.
- Break your routine if you are stuck in a rut. Try walking to your classes along a different route, trying new foods at lunch, sitting in a different chair by someone new in class.
- Practice guided imagery to relax and create a positive mood.
- Balance school work and personal life: Set aside time to do things you enjoy.
- Read a positive book five to 10 minutes every morning to start your day off right and shield yourself from negativity during the day.
- Check and monitor your Vitamin D level (it may get low in cloudy months).
- You might be feeling homesick, or missing old connections from home. Set dates in your calendar to reach out to your old support network – family, friends and community members will be glad to hear from you.
- Have an attitude of gratitude – write your blessings down. Start each morning and evening with a dose of Vitamin G: gratitude.
- Take five deep breaths when feeling early symptoms of stress. If it helps, think, “I am calm,” as you breathe in and, “I am letting all of the stress out,” as you breathe out.
- Talk to someone you trust about how you feel.
- Know your limits. Do not feel guilty when you have to say, “No.”
- Stay aligned with and pursue your dreams and passions.
- If you have a conflict with a roommate or friend, try to talk to them calmly, using “I” statements, such as, “I have a hard time sleeping with the light on,” rather than “you” statements or blame.
- Make a playlist of positive music to power you through times when you're feeling low.
- Be kind: help others and show others gratitude. Compassion for other people helps us feel good, too!
- Get at least 7 to 9 hours of sleep a night. Counting your blessings or playing white noise can help you to fall asleep.

# Financial Wellness

By Bernadette Mazurek Melnyk and Susan Neale

**I**f you're feeling stressed about your financial situation, you're not alone. 72% of Americans surveyed in a recent American Psychological Association (APA) study said they experience financial stress, worrying about everything from college tuition to their financial future in retirement.

Financial stress can definitely affect your physical and emotional well-being. According to the APA, high financial stress levels are associated with an increased risk for ulcers, migraines, heart attacks, depression, anxiety and sleep disturbance, and may lead to unhealthy coping mechanisms, such as binge drinking, smoking and overeating. Chronic stress can affect your cardiovascular system too, adding to the risk of high blood pressure, heart attack and stroke. Financial stress also can affect your psychological and emotional well-being, distracting you from your studies and complicating personal relationships.

Clearly, your mind and body can't afford financial stress. Fortunately, though, there are many ways you can take control. When you analyze, plan well and take control of your spending, you can make small steps that will lead to significant changes in how you spend, save and feel.



**Set aside time to evaluate your spending:** Make a financial date with yourself (and your family or partner if applicable) to make a plan for how and on what you will spend your money. Once you've got a plan in place, schedule monthly checkups to stay on track.

**Prioritize:** Decide where you really want your money to go each month and draw up a budget you can live by. Make the best possible use of what you have to get the most of what you want.

**Savings hacks:** Local restaurants, movie theaters, entertainment venues and other businesses may offer student discounts, so always ask and carry your student I.D. with you. In general, if you have to buy a ticket for it, there may be a student discount. *New York Times* "Your Money" columnist Ron Lieber suggests checking with your wireless and phone carriers for better deals periodically, and spending gift cards as soon as you get them so they don't get lost.

**The importance of interest:** The math is simple: money you invest can earn you more money; money you borrow costs you money. Even small amounts, such as spending money on a cup of coffee a few times a week add up. As financial analyst Trent Hamm explains, three \$4 coffee lattes a week for 40 years cost a total of \$24,960. But invest that \$12 a week in a fund earning 5% interest, and in 40 years you'll have \$79,772!

**Credit card basics:** A credit card, when used responsibly, can help you learn to manage your money and to build your credit score. Many students run into trouble with credit cards, though, because they don't understand the basics.

The math is simple: money you invest can earn you more money; money you borrow costs you money.



Here's how a credit card works: every time you make a purchase with a credit card, the bank is essentially loaning you the money, and expects payment at the due date each month.

- The amount you owe is called your **balance**. If you pay the balance every month on time, you will not be charged interest. If you miss the due date or don't pay all of it, you will be charged interest (an extra percentage of what you owe added on to what you owe) and usually a late fee as well. That interest keeps adding up until you pay your balance off down to zero.
- The APR is the amount of interest a credit card charges. Read everything carefully: some cards will give you 0% APR for a year, then shoot up to a much higher rate. This is called a **variable rate**. Try to find a card with a fixed rate instead.

“When you have a credit card, you need to be absolutely certain that the card doesn't lead you into a debt trap you can't escape from. This means using it in the most responsible way possible,” says finance writer Christy Bieber. “To use your card responsibly, avoid charging more than you can pay off in full at the end of each billing cycle. Carrying a balance is incredibly expensive and should be avoided at all costs!”

Save credit cards for emergencies. Making one small purchase a month and paying it off on time is enough to establish your credit score.

**College loans** can help students realize their dreams, but it's important to be realistic about college loans and not jeopardize your future by acquiring more debt than you can pay off. While a low interest rate may look small, that amount accrues and adds to your total each year. For instance, \$10,000 at 5% interest is \$10,500 after one year. The next year, that 500 also accrues interest, so it will be \$11,025 after two years. In 10 years, the debt will grow to 16,289. Even if you are making regular payments on your loan, the part that is not paid off is still accruing interest yearly. When considering a loan, calculate how much it will grow over time, even with regular payments to understand the true cost.

Feeling in charge of your finances will boost your confidence, help you focus, give you peace of mind, and alleviate a lot of stress and anxiety. And that's a good feeling!

# Spiritual Wellness

By David Hrabe, Bernadette Mazurek Melnyk and Susan Neale

**H**ave you ever felt like a “human doing” instead of a “human being”? As we fling ourselves from one activity to another, it is sometimes difficult to get beyond our list of “to dos” and to stay in touch with those aspects of our lives that mean the most to us. It’s important to remember that well-rounded self-care also involves spiritual wellness.

## **Spirituality: what are we talking about here?**

Your spiritual welfare doesn’t have to do with what you own, what job you have, or even your physical health. It’s about what inspires you, what gives you hope, and what you feel strongly about. Your spirit is the seat of your deepest values and character. Whether or not you practice a religion, you can recognize that there is part of you that goes beyond the analytical thinking of your intellect; it’s the part of you that feels, makes value judgements, and ponders your connection to others, to your moral values, and to the world. For this reason, spirituality is often discussed in terms of a search. Being spiritually well is a continuing journey of seeking out answers and connections. To be spiritually well is to be willing to seek answers and see things in new ways. It also means finding your purpose in life and staying aligned with it.

While religion and spirituality can be connected, they are different. A faith community or organized religion can give people an outlet for their spirituality, but religion is not spirituality’s only expression. Hope, love, joy, meaning, purpose, connection, appreciation of beauty, caring and compassion for others are all parts of the spiritual dimension of wellness.

## **Spirituality and work**

As a student, you are probably putting a lot of thought into finding the right kind of career for yourself. What kind of work will make you feel the most energized, connected and happy? While there is great satisfaction in learning a new skill and mastering it, there is more to job satisfaction. Many people cite times they really connect with another person – family, friends, colleagues, patients – as most satisfying. This is the “more” – when we go beyond just our needs and wants to connect beyond just ourselves. Humans are wired this way – to be in relationship with others.



## Disconnected much?

The many pressures, activities and distractions that students face may interfere with what is most important to them. Working a part-time job, studying hard, worrying about college debt, trying to keep up with everyone on social media and dealing with thousands of distractions on the internet vying for attention – these can create the perfect storm that makes it difficult to act on your values or take the time to find your purpose in life.

## What is purpose?

You may be at the beginning of your journey to find your life's purpose, and that is okay. One way to define your purpose is to think of how you would like others to remember you. The word “purpose” may sound grand, but you don't have to find a cure for cancer or become famous to have a purpose in life. Purpose is simply what you intend and are determined to do, based on your values. For instance, you might determine to be kind, to be dependable, to help others – all of these can be part of your purpose.

In his groundbreaking work with professional athletes, Jim Loehr, EdD, argues that being out of touch with our life's purpose creates an extraordinary energy drain. People may run in marathons, eat the healthiest foods, and be at the top of their game professionally, but these really good things can become an end to themselves when they are disconnected from overall life purpose. Without connection to a life purpose, anything can become meaningless. Loehr writes, “when you find – or, more aptly, choose – your purpose, then you are the agent of your own happiness. You have the opportunity to harvest joy in both the pursuit and the achievement, the journey and the destination.” Our purpose, our reason for living on this planet, is at the foundation of our spiritual nature. Answering the question, “What will you do in the next 5 years if you can't fail?” will help you to dream and find purpose in your life.

## Joy in the journey

All of us experience tragedy, sadness and grief. They are a part of the human condition. If you're wondering if it is possible to find joy and peace under what appear to be impossible conditions, remember this: History is replete with ordinary humans rising to challenges of the day in extraordinary ways. They were able to unlock that part of themselves that gave them the strength and courage to carry on.

You too are extraordinary, and your life is a precious, unrepeatable gift. On the next page are some ideas to consider as you continue your journey.



**Write to discover purpose.** Try journaling about what you would like your purpose in life to be. When you are ready, see if you can write down, in a few simple sentences, what would be meaningful for you to do in your life time. You can rephrase this statement as you grow through life.

**Reconnect/reimagine your life's purpose.** Set aside some time for a “retreat with yourself” to carefully consider your purpose and whether or how you are living it out. Where do you need to make adjustments? What do you need to stop doing? What do you need to start doing? Periodically “taking stock” is critical to staying on purpose.

**Ramp up your positive affect skills.** Many spiritual leaders from multiple faith traditions cite cultivating an “attitude of gratitude” as essential to their daily practice. In their work with newly diagnosed HIV+ patients, J.T. Moskowitz and colleagues developed an intervention to improve one’s emotional outlook even in the midst of a very challenging circumstance. Their intervention involves cultivating positive emotions through these daily practices:

1. Recognize a positive event each day.
2. Savor that event and log it in a journal or tell someone about it.
3. Start a daily gratitude journal.
4. List a personal strength and note how you used it.
5. Set an attainable goal and note your progress.
6. Report a relatively minor stress and list ways to reappraise the event positively.
7. Recognize and practice small acts of kindness daily.
8. Practice mindfulness, focusing on the here and now rather than the past or future.

The results of their work have been promising and showed that over time the positive effects increased.

**Consider some kind of meditative practice.** Traditional forms of meditation can include prayer, chanting, or sitting in stillness with a quiet mind. Some people prefer physical action that incorporates meditation such as yoga, tai chi, gardening or simply walking. Experiment – find what works for you. There are many free meditation videos and soundtracks available on the internet, such as “The Daily Calm” on YouTube, which presents a new 10-minute guided meditation every day.

You’ll notice that many of these ideas are connected to recommendations we’ve made for other dimensions of wellness. This is not a mistake! We are whole human beings and these practices support multiple dimensions at once.

Remember, it’s never too late to make a change for the positive! If you take a few, small steps in the direction you want to go, you will be amazed at the results.

# Social Wellness

By Bernadette Mazurek Melnyk and Susan Neale

**S**ocial well-being can be defined as our ability to effectively interact with people around us and create a support system that includes family and friends. It fosters connection with others and contributes to a sense of belonging, which is important for optimal wellness.

Just as some people are born with great physical health, others seem naturally fortunate to have a big family and many friends. However, social wellness is not merely having a big group of friends and family with whom to connect. It includes developing the skills that will help you to relate to others in a healthy and meaningful way. Conflict management, setting boundaries, communication skills, assertiveness, respect for others and the ability to balance your time between social and personal needs are all part of maintaining healthy relationships. In other words, there's a great deal of social wellness that is learned behavior. We can all continually improve on these skills. If you're feeling socially disconnected, there are ways to build your support network and foster social well-being.

How important is social wellness to our lives and overall health? Some see it as a life-giving connection. "We can't underestimate the power that we have as individuals to provide the support that people need," said United States Surgeon General Vivek Murthy. Concerned about the opioid crisis, Murthy met with many affected people and was impressed by how often they stressed the importance of social connection. Many individuals in recovery told him they would not have made it without the support of others, even if only one person had given them support. Social support, says Murthy, can "provide that transition from a place of pain to a place of possibility."



**What is loneliness?** Social isolation, or being alone, doesn't always mean loneliness. In fact, some people who are surrounded by family and friends feel lonely; others who live and work alone don't feel lonely at all. Psychology researchers Julianne Holt-Lunstad and Timothy B. Smith from Brigham Young University, who studied the links of loneliness and social isolation to cardiovascular disease, define loneliness as “the discrepancy between one’s desired and actual level of social connection.” That means that if being alone doesn't bother us, we aren't lonely; only when we notice the lack of social connection do we feel the stress of loneliness. However, feelings of loneliness are very real. The health risks are, too: Holt-Lunstad and Smith found that social isolation and loneliness increased risk of death by upwards of 30 percent, a greater risk than that of smoking or obesity.

While we all feel lonely at times, this emotional state has been misunderstood in the past. Lonely people have been characterized as anti-social “loners,” lacking in social skills. Not wanting to be blamed for their loneliness, many people resist admitting to it, even to themselves. According to social neuroscientist John Cacioppo, PhD, ('75 MA, '77 PhD Ohio State), that's dangerous. Brain image studies show that loneliness puts the brain into a survival-mode state of hypervigilance, and the negative effects include increased cortisol levels, impulsive responding and fitful sleep. Cacioppo urges people to respond to feeling isolated or other signs of loneliness as they would to other biological indicators that something is needed, such as feelings of hunger, thirst, or pain.

Studies on the impact of loneliness on physical health are alarming. Loneliness has been found to raise levels of stress hormones and inflammation, which can increase the risk of heart disease, arthritis, Type 2 diabetes and dementia, according to Lisa Jaremka, PhD. Jaremka also found that people who are lonely may have depressed immune systems, brought on by stress. Another study found that loneliness was a risk factor for dementia.



While the implications of loneliness are disheartening, there is a lot that you can do to improve your social wellness. Here are a few ways to improve your relationships with others and connect to new people:

- **Disconnect to connect.** Although technology has many positives, it also can be a barrier to connecting to others in your home or work environment. Make it a regular routine to disconnect from technology every day to spend some time in face-to-face communication with the people around you. Put away electronics during quality time with family and friends such as meals or important conversations so that you can be present and enjoy the moment.
- **Find support in class.** Make an effort to make friends in lectures and classes to help build support for one another in the courses you are taking. Try starting a study group to stay connected.
- **Improve your communication skills.** Communicate in person whenever possible. Learn to use “I” statements, such as “I need to talk to you,” instead of “you” statements such as, “You don’t listen.” Consider taking a class in communication skills.
- **Connect with your community.** Volunteering can give you a sense of self-worth and connect you to other people. Or, consider joining a campus group focused on an activity you enjoy, or one that you’d like to learn more about.
- **Be positive.** Other people will enjoy being with you, and you will enjoy yourself with a positive outlook. Put disappointments, complaints and worries aside for a while and enjoy the present.
- **Evaluate your emotional intelligence.** Are you sensitive to others’ emotions? If not, you may be missing signals they’re giving you about what they need from you as a friend or family member. Take an interpersonal skills test to discover areas where you could improve. You can find a free interpersonal skills test at [Skillsyouneed.com](https://www.skillsyouneed.com).

- **Celebrate and complement your family and friends.** Take time to bolster your family members and personal friendships with a call or visit. Don't wait for birthdays to celebrate; it's always a good time to send a card or connect in person. Make a regular habit of complementing and thanking people when it is deserved. The book *How to Win Friends and Influence People* by Dale Carnegie has some great suggestions.
- **Greet people warmly.** There is great value in smiling and remembering people by their first name.
- **Improve time management:** When you arrive on time, you show that you respect and value others. Don't keep people waiting.
- **Build a culture of respect for others around you.** When you model respect for others who may be different from you, you gain respect, too.

We can't underestimate the power that we have as individuals to provide the support that people need.”

– *21st Surgeon General Vivek Murthy*

- **Make an action plan to connect to others and put it in your calendar.** Don't just wait for it to happen; you can be pro-active about your social wellness.
- **Respect your partner.** Studies show that successful couples name respect as the most important part of their relationship, valuing it even higher than communication. Whether you're just dating or in a committed relationship, respect means showing that person that they are important to you and treating them with kindness.
- **Learn to argue in a positive, constructive way.** Psychologist John Gottman PhD, who heads the Relationship Research Institute, points out that most friends, co-workers and couples argue from time to time, and that's not necessarily bad – the important thing is to know the right way to argue. Relationships can thrive when people know how to successfully deal with conflict.

Disrespectful arguing includes:

1. Criticizing the other's character
2. Being defensive or blaming
3. Showing contempt for the other
4. Threatening to withdraw from the argument, or ignoring the other

Successful arguing includes:

1. Respectful language: no name-calling or insults
2. Brief breaks for cooling down, if needed
3. Focus on now: don't bring up previous arguments
4. Perspective: being "right" isn't as important as making sure you both feel respected

Remember, when you take steps to strengthen your own social wellness, you strengthen social wellness for others, too. That's a great gift of health and wellness for all of your family and friends, and the friends you have yet to meet!

# Career Wellness

By Brenda C. Buffington, Madelyn M. Carson, Bernadette Mazurek Melnyk and Susan Neale

If you are feeling confused about your future career plans or unsure about your major, relax: you are not alone. With all of the pressure on students starting in high school to narrow their interests and pick a major, it can seem like everyone knows from birth what career they want. In reality, most people probably do not, and many of your classmates are searching for answers. A survey of a recent class of first-year students at a large public university showed that 38% changed their majors before their first semester even began. It is estimated that as many as 50 – 75% of students change majors at least once before graduation. Once students have graduated, career exploration continues: studies show that the average college graduate holds 11.8 jobs before retiring! Think of yourself as beginning your process now of career exploration, and listen to what your heart and mind are telling you about where you want to go.

Career wellness is defined as engaging in work that provides personal satisfaction and enrichment and that is consistent with your values, goals, and lifestyle to keep you professionally healthy. After sleep, we spend most of our time at work, so ask yourself what kind of work would motivate you and let you use your abilities to your full potential.

## How do I pick a major that's right for me?

- **Read the catalog, make a list.** One savvy student advises exploring the many majors available and making a list of every one that sounds good to you or that fits your abilities. Then look up requirements for the majors you like to see which fit well with the credits you already have and your interests. When you have narrowed the list down, show it to your academic advisor and ask them which majors might be a good fit.
- **Ask your advisor** what occupations a major can lead to.
- **Speak to industry professionals.** Ask for a brief informational interview at an industry that interests you. Your university's alumni association may be able to put you in touch with an alumni who can provide information or mentorship about a career you are interested in.

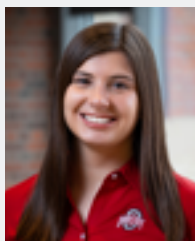




- **Talk to professors about their career paths.** They can provide you with information about why they chose their area of expertise and what their professional peers are doing.
- **Take a test.** Online career discernment tests can be fun to take and will help you think about the kinds of jobs and workplaces that might suit you.
- **Consider adding a minor** in a subject that interests you.
- **Listen to yourself** about what you enjoy doing and what your passions are, and think of ways you can make a career out of those interests.

## *A student's story*

By Madelyn M. Carson



“What is your major? What kind of career are you going to pursue?” I dreaded these questions when I first came to college because – I had no idea. I had only lived 18 years of my life, yet I was being asked to decide what I wanted to do for the next 40 years. This was not a decision I took lightly.

I was envious of my friends deciding their career paths and areas of studies with such ease. I noticed the excitement in their eyes when they talked about their passions and the awkward silence that would follow when I admitted to not knowing mine. I also felt pressure from my family to pursue certain careers. As my stress and anxiety about this situation grew, I spent hours researching possible majors, the type of classes they have, and the careers they led to.

Once college started, I entered the Exploratory program so that I could receive advice and assistance. I had many extremely different curriculums on my short list: business, medicine, law, and computer science. My advisor told me that in addition to classes, internships and campus clubs could help me decide. Weirdly enough, those diverse experiences from classes to student organizations helped me narrow my interests and identify my passions.

Eventually, I found a major that had everything I enjoyed studying: industrial engineering. It had a wide range of coursework from mathematics, sciences and business, and led to a career path where I could do almost anything. The more I researched it, the more my excitement grew. For the first time in my life, I felt confident in my next steps towards my future.

My advisor warned me that many students found engineering to be too hard and switched out, and that my grades so far did not support success in this field, but she didn't know how much it meant to me. I left the advising appointment frustrated, my eyes filled with tears. My friends and loved ones, though, told me to continue pursuing engineering and that they believed in me, so I did.

Now, I am a graduate with a degree in Industrial and Systems Engineering. I was hired for my first professional job in my field before I even graduated! I want those who are worried about finding their future not to stress too much. Listen to your heart and what you are interested in. While you are trying to find those interests, ask lots of questions, put yourself out there, get involved and take some risks. Most importantly, when you find that passion you wish to pursue, believe in yourself every step of the way.

If you are working while earning your degree, you may have a lot of stresses to balance. Here are some tips for wellness at work.

**Mindfulness on the job:** Mindfulness involves developing an intentional awareness that is open and accepting, allowing oneself to respond rather than react to situations. Research has supported that mindfulness can increase on-the-job resilience and improve effectiveness and safety.

- Quiet your inner voice and just breathe for five slow and deep breaths using the 4-7-8 method: inhale counting to 4, hold for a count of 7, and exhale for a count of 8. You can learn more about mindful breathing at [yp4h.osu.edu/justbreathe](http://yp4h.osu.edu/justbreathe) and try syncing your breathing to an animated graphic.
- Many free apps like Insight Timer, Smiling Mind and Mindfulness Coach can help you quickly ease into mindfulness.

**Self-care and self-healing in the workplace:** Self-care can include taking a short exercise break, such as a wellness walk outside or up and down a few flights of stairs; posting a few beautiful pictures of nature in your workspace to reduce stress; or just making a friend at work to talk to during breaks. Above all, try to keep your spirits high and remain positive.

**Cultivate a positive mindset:** Leadership experts Tim & Brian Kight of Focus 3 explain “one of the distinguishing characteristics of successful people is not only their ability to generate a positive, productive mindset, but to sustain it.” There’s a lot of power in keeping yourself positive, and in remembering that every event’s outcome is tempered by your response to it. The Kights formulate the importance of your response, or “R factor” this way:  $E + R = O$ : An event plus your response equals the outcome.

**Multitask less, monotask more:** Do you ever end up feeling fried at the end of a day? Multitasking may be the culprit – it is the enemy of full engagement. Try becoming more aware of when you are distracted and picture a STOP sign. Then give your all to one task.

**Purpose, pleasure and pride:** founder of Blue Zones Dan Buettner, who has researched both happiness and longevity extensively, says purpose, pleasure and pride are important to a long and happy life. It’s important to find work that you will enjoy, feel proud doing, and that fulfills your sense of purpose. It may take a long time to find it, so don’t feel discouraged. You are at the beginning of a wonderful journey.

# Intellectual Wellness

By Bernadette Mazurek Melnyk, Susan Neale and Madelyn M. Carson

If you visit a fencing gym, you'll see athletes trying to stand on wobble boards — platforms with rounded bases like half of an exercise ball. The more they throw themselves off balance, the more their leg and ankle muscles strengthen and learn to correct to an upright position. When muscles are challenged, they grow and strengthen — and the same is true for our brains. It's just as important to engage in activities to strengthen our brains and intellectual wellness as it is to strengthen our muscles.

What is intellectual well-being and why is it important? Lindsay Bernhagen, PhD, defines it this way: “The intellectually well person values lifelong learning and seeks to foster critical thinking, develop moral reasoning, expand worldviews and engage in education for the pursuit of knowledge.” Just as a flexible body indicates physical health, she says, a flexible mind indicates intellectual wellness. Any time you learn a new skill or concept, attempt to understand a different viewpoint, or exercise your mind with puzzles and games, you're building intellectual well-being.

Intellectual well-being is not just a concept; it actually improves the physical structure of your brain. While we once thought that humans

Intellectual well-being, or keeping your mind flexible, informed, and engaged, is as important as physical health. More than just a concept, intellectual wellness actually improves the physical structure of your brain.





were born with all of the brain cells (also called neurons) they would ever have, new scientific investigations have shown that neurogenesis regularly replaces old, dead cells in some regions of the brain. Studies show that both physical exercise and mental exercise – learning new things, for example – support the growth and life of these new neurons, while stress and depression can hinder them. Challenging your brain also helps existing neurons form new connections. Therefore, a combination of intellectual growth and relaxing mindfulness really can boost your brain’s health and prevent mental decline as you age!

### **Practice mindfulness, give your brain a break**

As a college student, your brain is being challenged and exercised in many ways, from learning new life routines, meeting new people, and navigating new landscapes, to studying and learning about subjects you have never encountered before. To prevent mental exhaustion, build little recovery breaks into your day. Try resting your eyes and your mind 10 minutes for every 50 that you study. Do your best to divide study material into daily amounts you can handle, instead of trying to cram a lot of material all at once. Enjoy meals as “time off” for your mind – put your studies aside and focus on enjoying your food. Taking a short walk or a few moments to gaze out of a window can really help your mind relax.

Mindfulness is a mental state achieved by focusing your awareness on the present moment, while calmly acknowledging and accepting your feelings, thoughts, and bodily sensations. When you take time to “just be,” you also allow your brain a chance to refresh and regroup.

To practice mindfulness, focus your awareness on the present moment. One way to do this is to focus on your breathing: take slow deep breaths in and out and concentrate on the air moving in and out of your lungs. Acknowledge thoughts and let them go without exploring any anxieties about the future or regrets about the past. Just be present with yourself, without having to think about anything. A few minutes of mindfulness practice a day allows your brain to relax, de-stress and recharge. An easy to read book about mindfulness is “The Present,” by Spencer Johnson, MD.

### **Intellectual wellness tactics**

There are many other ways to improve your intellectual wellness, and the habits you start now can help keep your mind in top shape for the rest of your life. On the next page are some strategies to improve your intellectual wellness.

**Read:** Reading for fun is a great way to shed stress and use your imagination. Try reading news stories 20 minutes a day to stay informed about the world, nonfiction to learn about new subjects, or, for a new experience, ask a friend to recommend a book you wouldn't ordinarily choose. Read about a political issue and try debating it with a friend, taking the opposite side from your own point of view. Anything you read for fun, whether it's a mystery, a graphic novel, or a friend's travel blog, can exercise your ability to visualize and make new neural connections.

**Learn outside of your major:** There are many free lectures, concerts, and performances on any college campus. Try something outside of your discipline to stretch your mind. Ask friends who have different majors what they are learning about.

**Play:** Sudoku, crossword puzzles, and strategic games like chess and Scrabble® exercise your mind and memory. Role playing games can really exercise your imagination. Try a new game or a sport that you don't usually play for a mental challenge.

**Explore:** Go out to a concert, movie, or play you might not ordinarily choose. Travel, too, can put you in new situations and promote intellectual growth and problem-solving. See if your university has a student exchange program that will give you the opportunity to study and live in another country. Try a new adventure! Stay curious. Even taking a different route to your classes can stimulate your mind.

Engaging in lifelong learning, challenging your mind and following your curiosity sets the stage for a vibrant, centered and mentally active life. When you work to improve your intellectual well-being, you strengthen your mind—and you will never be bored!

## *Advice from a student*

- Do not work while eating. Instead, use mealtimes as a mental break from studying.
- Reading for fun can help with creativity and reduce stress.
- Connect with your professors. Go to your professor's office hours, not only to get help with test review and homework, but also to introduce yourself and build relationships with your professors. Every professor is incredibly knowledgeable about what they do, and has unique experiences to share.
- Preparing is important. Come to class a few minutes early, mark important dates in your calendar at the beginning of the semester, and remember to schedule more time for assignments than you think you need to make room for mistakes and emergencies.

# Creative Wellness

By Laura Newpoff, Bernadette Mazurek Melnyk and Susan Neale

**E**xpressing yourself through the arts can be one of the more enjoyable components of an overall wellness plan. According to the American Public Health Association, there is evidence that one's engagement with artistic activities, either as an observer of the creative works of others or as an initiator of one's own creative pursuits, can enhance a person's moods, emotions, and other psychological states and have a salient impact on important health parameters.

Creativity has long been thought of as a key piece of the wellness puzzle. A review of more than 100 studies of the benefits of the arts (music, visual arts, dance and writing) found that creative expression had a powerful impact on health and well-being of various patient populations. Most of the studies agreed that engagement in the arts fosters a decrease in depressive symptoms, an increase in positive emotions, reduction in stress, and in some cases, improvements in immune system functioning.

Other studies have found that creative works and exposure to the arts can impact conditions like Parkinson's disease and some forms of dementia and cancer. And, creative wellness is good for your intellectual wellness, too: a study by the Mayo Clinic proposed that people who engage in activities like painting, drawing, sculpting and crafts like woodworking, pottery, ceramics and quilting, in middle and older age may delay cognitive decline. When studying people in their mid- to late 80s, the Mayo Clinic found that the behavior that had the greatest protective effect against cognitive decline was artistic activity.

## We're all creative

So many people miss out on the joy of creative expression because they fear they are not "talented" or that they won't be good at it. If you can let go of the need to be good at something, you can have a lot of fun and grow, too. If you want to play a new sport, you probably have to learn from the beginning and practice for a long time, and the same is true for most artistic endeavors. So don't be disappointed if you can't pick up a flute and play it right away, or dance a complicated routine in your first class. Remind yourself that it's okay to be a beginner. Pick an area of creative expression that looks fun to you, and try to just enjoy it without having to judge yourself.







*The Artist's Way* by Julia Cameron is an international bestseller that has helped millions of people overcome their creative fears. Here are some insights from the author:

- “We are far more colorful, far more creative, and far more charismatic than we know.”
- “With art, we [are]... more truly ourselves, and those selves are colorful and beautiful.”
- “Remember that in order to recover as an artist, you must be willing to be a bad artist. Give yourself permission to be a beginner. By being willing to be a bad artist, you have a chance to be an artist, and perhaps, over time, a very good one.”

Research findings have supported that art activities reduce stress, and art therapy “is rich with opportunities for research that can enhance and validate what is already common knowledge to most art therapists and their clients: that art is life enhancing,” art therapy expert Cathy Malchiodi, PhD, wrote in *Psychology Today*. Stress management expert Elizabeth Scott assures us that “Those who are not artistically inclined can still gain quite a bit from artistic creation ... Studies that examine the effects of art on stress and mood don’t analyze the talent of the subjects or the quality of their creations, just the effects on how they feel afterward, and these effects are highly positive.”

### Ways to be creatively well

Art, music, dance, writing and drama have all been called healing arts, but there are dozens of creative pursuits you can seek out as part of a wellness plan to help you lower stress, cope with a loss, form new connections, or simply be happier. Here are some things you can do to weave creative wellness principles into even the busiest of schedules:

**Join an art or pottery class.** While you learn new things and enjoy artistic activity, you may also benefit from social interaction with others and the chance to make new friends. Many venues stress that no talent or experience is necessary to participate.

**Try dance.** Dancing is known as a stress reliever that releases endorphins, and it can be a good workout, too. If you’re nervous about trying to pirouette or bust a move in front of a group of strangers, YouTube has many free instructional videos you can try at home. Mix dancing in with your workout routine to fight off monotony.

**Use the magic of music.** Make it a regular practice to release more of those feel-good endorphins by belting out some of your favorite tunes, whether you’re in the car, the shower or on a break at work. It’s been

reported that singing can help ease muscle tension and decrease stress hormones in your blood stream. Listening to your favorite music also can help you relax and reduce stress.

**Journal and doodle.** Pulling out a blank-canvas journal and chronicling your day with doodles can be a great way to de-stress. You can experiment with different shapes and colors and even download doodling apps to help spark an endless amount of creative ideas.

**Express yourself through poetry and writing.** Expressing your thoughts in new ways can be a cathartic exercise. Try poetry to communicate your feelings, especially during times when you need closure or are trying to understand an insecurity. Writing is one of the great healing arts. A simple daily diary can help you release feelings onto a page instead of keeping them bottled up inside.

**Try drama.** Acting can be a great way to explore your creative side. Volunteer for a small part with a local theater group. Or get a group together for a video call and try reading through a script to one of your favorite movies or TV shows. You can find scripts for free at websites like the Internet Movie Script Database ([imsdb.com](http://imsdb.com)).

**Conceive a photography project.** Embark on a photo project – pick a theme like fall leaves or doorways, for example. The exercise will allow you to practice mindfulness – you’ll pay more attention to every leaf and doorway you see – and have an artistic product to show off at the end.

**Find your city’s museums and arts venues.** Explore beyond campus for local museums, symphonies, ballet. Ask about student tickets – they are often available at a fraction of the regular price, and many museums have free admission for students.

**Have fun cooking.** Cooking doesn’t have to be complicated or difficult. Try simple recipes first to build your skills. Ask your family how to cook one of your favorite meals so you can enjoy it away from home and share it with friends.

**Join a student organization.** Many student organizations have a creative focus, and you can exercise your creativity in any organization you join. Creating events or amazing projects can help with your creative wellness and “thinking outside the box.”

There are plenty of other creative efforts you can pursue as part of your wellness strategy. You can get creative while exercising, writing a presentation, helping a friend redecorate their dorm room; the possibilities are endless. The world’s greatest artists had no formal roadmap for their paintings, poems and prose, and neither should you.

# Environmental Wellness

By Megan Amaya, Bernadette Mazurek Melnyk and Susan Neale

**Y**ou don't have to go far to experience nature. It can be on campus, a community park or walking trail, or you can venture miles from home for a long hike, water skiing, camping or canoeing. Once you're outside, the rest of life seems to disappear. You become "one with nature," spiritually, mentally, physically as you appreciate all the beauty this planet has to offer. Your senses heighten as you become more aware of your surroundings with each passing minute. You may not realize it, but you are improving your own health and wellness. Yes, activities from that simple walk around the block to snow tubing down a wintry hill enhance your overall health. Did you ever consider it? We may not give a lot of thought to how the environment fits into our wellness efforts, but the environment and how we take care of it can have a huge impact on our overall health.

We interact with the environment constantly. The environment is not only the park, the woods or the lake. It is the building we live in, the car we drive, the classroom, and the food we eat. For several decades, research has been demonstrating that green space, such as parks, forests, and river corridors, are good for our health, physically and mentally. In one study, 71% of people found a reduction in depression after going for a walk outdoors versus a 45% reduction by those who went on an indoor the walk. In another study, gardening demonstrated a significant reduction in cortisol levels of subjects, a hormone related to stress. A systematic review of 60 studies from the United States, Canada, Australia, New Zealand and Europe on the relationships between green spaces and obesity found that green space is associated with reduced obesity.





We can all contribute to making our physical world and surroundings healthier, as they are key for our future well-being. You can work on your environmental wellness at college, at home, on the job, with your friends or through volunteering in the community and creating a culture of respect and gratitude. In addition, since environmental wellness includes the people around you, surrounding yourself with positive people who support you to achieve your goals will go far in helping you achieve optimal well-being.

Here are some ideas to get you started:

- **Use reusable water bottles.** Glass or stainless steel are the best options, but a standard water bottle will work well, too.
- **When possible, eat local.** Take advantage of farmers' markets, community-supported agriculture groups (CSAs), and restaurants that serve local foods. Local foods are often packed with more nutrients because the nutrients are not lost through long travel distances. Locally grown food also means less energy (fuel) used to get the food to your table or grocery store.

We can all contribute to making our physical world and surroundings healthier, as they are key for our future well-being.

- **Turn off the water.** Whether it's a faucet while you are brushing your teeth or the TV when you are not in the room, if you are not using something, turn it off. Doing so will save energy. As a bonus, it may save on your bills!
- **Travel environmentally friendly if you can.** Walk, ride your bike, or take public transportation, if it is an option. Find out about your university's transportation options.
- **Clean green.** Using natural or homemade cleaning products is better for you, your home, pets and the environment. Some items to keep on hand: white vinegar, salt, baking soda, lemons.
- **Use reusable shopping bags.** They cut down on the waste of plastic bags. According to *The Wall Street Journal*, the U.S. goes through 100 billion plastic shopping bags annually. Evidence shows plastic bags slowly release toxic chemicals once they get in the soil. If you use them, recycle the bags at your local grocery store.
- **Recycle.** Most communities recycle, whether at a city sponsored pick-up route or a drop-off location. Learn more about what you can recycle from your local solid waste authority.
- **Find green space on your campus.** Make a proactive plan for your environmental wellness by identifying green space you can get to on campus or nearby. Many universities have arboretums and walking trails.
- **Join a campus environmental group.** Getting together with other students – whether for a hike, a canoe trip or a volunteer clean-up mission – will keep you connected to the environment and other people.
- **Learn your university's environmental initiatives.** Find out if your university is striving towards zero waste, if it has a recycling center, and if it has policies for sustainability and conscientious use of land. If not, consider becoming active in student government or a student group to help your university's environmental wellness.

# Digital Wellness

By Madelyn M. Carson

Whether it be catching up with friends on Facetime, playing video games, or scrolling through TikTok, digital activities have become a staple of modern life. Digital wellness encompasses all of the actions you can take to make sure you are taking care of yourself while online and using your electronic devices. Like every other dimension, digital wellness can overlap with and have great impact on emotional, intellectual, career, and other dimensions of your well-being.

**Set limits on screen time.** College in recent years has dramatically increased its use of online technology for learning. Online classes provide convenience for students, who can submit homework or take an exam whether they are on campus, in their local coffee house, or hundreds of miles away. However, this also means students are spending many hours a day on their laptops and tablets in addition to the devices they use to socialize with friends or for entertainment. Balancing the amount of time spent in front of a screen is a crucial first step to maintaining your digital well-being, because screen time can also have significant consequences on your emotional and physical health. Excessive use of devices has been linked with lowered self-esteem, sleep deprivation, high blood pressure, and other negative health conditions. To be digitally well, monitor and limit time spent in front of screens like television, tablets, phones, and laptops. You can keep track of your screen time through the internal settings of many common devices, through third-party applications, or manually by keeping a log.

When you are digitally well, you consider the impact of your virtual presence and use of technology on your overall wellness by taking steps to create sustainable habits that support your values, goals, community, and safety.





**Stay grounded and connected.** Social media has made us more connected to family and friends than ever, and endless streams of content from apps like Instagram and Tik Tok keep us entertained for hours. However, studies show that many social media applications harm young adults' mental health, causing issues like anxiety, depression, and poor body image. Research shows that people who spend less than two hours a day on social media have significantly higher self-esteem. These studies put the need to limit screen time in sharp focus.

While technology and social media can connect us to those far away, they can also be isolating to those physically close to us. Social media applications are designed to keep you constantly scrolling, making it easy to ignore those around you. Take time to disconnect from devices and connect with those around you as part of your digital wellness.

**Show your best self.** When you post on social media, you build your “brand” – the image of yourself that you will eventually show to potential employers, graduate schools, and others. Part of a healthy relationship with social media is being careful with what you are posting and the digital identity you create online. Think before posting about whether the content is hurtful or appropriate to yourself or others.

**Approach strangers wisely, online and in person.** Any time you meet someone new who is not part of your real-world community, there are risks to consider, including fraud, intent to harm, and privacy breaches. To avoid dangerous situations, limit the amount of personal information you share online, and check for mutual friends on social media.

When meeting someone in person whom you met first online, avoid dangerous situations. Always tell a friend or family member where you are going, when you expect to be home, and whom you are going with before you leave. Meet for the first time in a public place, provide your own transportation, and have an exit strategy even if you have every reason to believe that things will go well. That way, the meeting is under your control and you can leave if you don't feel comfortable. Don't feel pressured or obligated to meet anyone you don't want to just because they asked.

**Be mindful of your digital footprint.** Your digital footprint encompasses every digital record you create online. This can include data being collected about the order you place on Grubhub or the website you visit to buy a new pair of jeans. This collected data can then be sold to other third parties such as marketing organizations and used for other purposes. Thinking critically about the digital footprint you create is an important step in protecting the privacy of your information and improving your digital wellness.

## National resources

### 988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline

988

[988lifeline.org](https://988lifeline.org)

### National Domestic Violence Hotline

(800) 799-7233

[thehotline.org](https://thehotline.org)

### National Grad Crisis Line

(877) 472-3457

[gradresources.org/crisis](https://gradresources.org/crisis)

### National Sexual Assault Hotline

(800) 656-4673

[rainn.org](https://rainn.org)

### National Suicide Prevention Lifeline

(800) 273-8255

[suicidepreventionlifeline.org](https://suicidepreventionlifeline.org)

### National Suicide Prevention Lifeline (Options for Deaf and Hard of Hearing)

For TTY Users: Use your preferred relay service or dial 711 then 1-800-273-8255

[suicidepreventionlifeline.org/help-yourself/for-deaf-hard-of-hearing](https://suicidepreventionlifeline.org/help-yourself/for-deaf-hard-of-hearing)

### Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration National Helpline

(800) 662-4357

[samhsa.gov/find-help/national-helpline](https://samhsa.gov/find-help/national-helpline)

### Support Services to LGBTQ Young People: The Trevor Project

1-(866)-488-7386

Text START to 678-678

[thetrevorproject.org](https://thetrevorproject.org)

### Veterans Crisis Line

(800) 273-8255, PRESS 1

Text 838255

Chat online

[veteranscrisisline.net](https://veteranscrisisline.net)

These resources and more can be found at the American Psychological Association's Crisis Hotlines and Resources page: [apa.org/topics/crisis-hotlines](https://apa.org/topics/crisis-hotlines)

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