

# *Take Hold of Wellness*

*How to Have Health and Vitality  
in Your Life*

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## **Welcome!**

How would you like to enjoy greater health and vitality?

This guide will walk you through steps you can take to achieve greater wellness in 10 key areas that impact your overall well-being.

Pick an area that matters to you, and pick one particular thing to take action on. That one change will make a difference in your life. It will also build your confidence and lay the groundwork for further changes.

With some effort and consistent follow through, you have the ability to take hold of wellness in your life!

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## **1. Physical Health and Eating Well**

You've heard it before, and it's true: what you eat and drink directly impacts your physical health. This includes your energy level, your ability to fight off illnesses, and even how well your body holds up as you age.

Eating well becomes increasingly important as you get older, because of how your body is changing. As a young adult, you can get away with a lot; not so much later on in life! With each passing decade, poor eating habits will take a toll. You'll see it and feel it.

We're all different—different physiques, different activity levels, different food preferences. No single diet is going to work for everyone, but there are some basic principles that everyone can benefit from:

- Aim for consistency in your eating from day to day, rather than overeating one day and then starving yourself the next.
  - Soft drinks provide virtually nothing in the way of nutritional value. And whether you go with the regular sugar-sweetened kind or artificially sweetened versions, neither one is good for your health. If you consume a lot of these drinks, try cutting back and drinking water instead.
  - Boost your nutrient intake by eating some vegetables every day. Different coloured vegetables provide different nutrients, so aim for variety, e.g.: tomatoes, carrots, peppers (red, yellow, green), cauliflower, broccoli, and leafy greens like spinach and Swiss chard.
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- Satisfy your sweet tooth with fresh fruit, rather than packaged, sugar-filled snacks. Like vegetables, different colours are linked to different nutrients, so aim for variety, e.g.: bananas, apples, oranges, peaches, avocados, grapes (red, green, black), plums, and berries.



- Replace your usual chocolate bar with good quality dark chocolate. The latter has less sugar and is more satiating, so you'll feel less inclined to overindulge.
- Prepare more of your meals from scratch, rather than eating a lot of pre-prepared meals or fast food. This will help you avoid a lot of unwanted "hidden" ingredients (e.g.: chemical preservatives, fats, oils, excess salt, and sweeteners) that can damage your health and contribute to unwanted weight gain.

If you're not much of a kitchen person or you find meal preparation challenging, make things easier by cooking in large batches over the weekend. You can have the leftovers during the week, so you don't have to cook every day. You can freeze a few portions to have in future.

## **2. Friendship and Social Connections**

We are all social creatures to one extent or another, and we all benefit from the support and encouragement that friendship brings.

Several studies have also shown that social support contributes to improved health outcomes in a variety of areas. At a personal level, we all know how meaningful connections can make a world of difference to our lives.

Make an effort to keep with existing friendships. This might mean going the extra mile to stay connected, but it's worth it. If a friend doesn't respond as quickly or as often as you would like, don't rush to take things personally; there could be things going in the person's life that have nothing to do with you.

At the same time, open yourself up to new connections, including people who might be outside your age group or who might come from a different walk of life. You never know when and where a close friendship might develop unexpectedly.

### **3. Home Environment**

A cluttered environment can become a major distraction, making it hard to concentrate. Set aside time to declutter and get organized; you'll feel better and be more productive.



Make your environment appealing with items that are meaningful to you. Fresh flowers, art, plants, photos, and treasured gifts can all create a pleasant and encouraging space, and will also contribute to a healthy frame of mind.

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#### **4. Growth and Learning**

Don't let yourself get stuck in a rut! Whether it's astronomy or glass-blowing, karate or pottery, stretch yourself by learning something new. You'll be doing something good for your body, mind, and soul.

How about that musical instrument you've always wanted to play? Or that language you've always wanted to learn? Tackling something you've always wanted to do can be immensely rewarding and build confidence. But putting too much pressure on yourself can turn it into a less than joyous experience, leading to discouragement.

Just remember to set realistic expectations for yourself. Learning something new is challenging and you're not going to master things overnight. Be patient with yourself; set realistic goals and enjoy the journey. And be proud of yourself for taking up the challenge!



#### **5. Stress Management**

Life brings challenges and difficulties, and they can leave us feeling overwhelmed at times. While some issues can be prevented through planning and preparation, there are other issues that can't be avoided no matter what we do; we simply have no choice but to face them and deal with them. In the process, we find ourselves experiencing stress.

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Your body's stress response ("fight-or-flight") is biologically hard-wired into you to enable you to deal with dangerous threats. When this response kicks in, hormones like adrenaline and cortisol are released. In the short-term, this isn't harmful. However, it's important that the stress response be de-activated so your body can return to a normal, balanced state. If your body remains in that heightened response state, with high levels of those stress hormones, it can lead to a host of health problems.



Work on adopting healthy coping mechanisms and strategies to manage stressful situations when they occur. For some people, calming activities like a leisurely bike ride, a walk in nature, or a regular yoga practice can help.

Others might benefit from an intense workout that gets their blood pumping and helps them let off steam. Find what works for you.

Don't underestimate the benefits of breathing exercises, visualization, and similar relaxation techniques to help manage stress effectively. Many people are surprised by the powerful effect these practices can have.

## **6. Emotional Well-Being**

Emotional well-being is an integral part of overall wellness. We need to manage our emotions from day to day, and even moment to moment. But that doesn't mean that ignoring, stifling, or stuffing emotions, as this can lead to anger, resentment, and depression.

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*Ideally, you want to acknowledge your emotions as they arise, and express them in appropriate ways. This means that even as you experience the emotion, you also maintain an awareness of yourself, including what you're saying and doing. You want to reach a place where you can experience your emotions without having them take over and control you.*

*The ability to manage and express emotions isn't something we intuitively know how to do; recognize when it's time to reach out for support of some kind. Getting in touch with your emotions and learning how to manage them is a worthwhile endeavour that will improve your well-being and yield benefits across every area of your life.*

## **7. Thought Patterns**

*We all experience negative thoughts from time to time. Left unchecked, these thoughts can start to shape our perspective and actions—and not for the better. They typically lead to unpleasant feelings and unhelpful behaviours.*

*Instead of feeding negative thoughts, challenge them. Ask yourself where these thoughts are coming from, and question their validity. Be proactive in identifying positive beliefs you can draw on to counter negative thoughts if and when they arise.*

*In many cases, what we're treating as a factual assessment of a situation is really just one subjective viewpoint. This is where **reframing** can help.*

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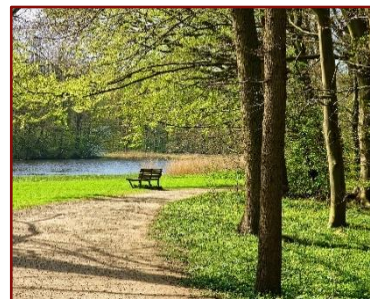
You can reframe the situation by coming at it from a different angle and adopting a different assessment of it. This enables you to see that you have options for how you think about things, and you can choose NOT to go with the most negative option.

## **8. Core Values**

There's an energy, confidence, and sense of fulfillment that comes when your daily activities are closely aligned with our core values. We feel happy, invigorated, grounded, alive, and full of energy.

Far too often, however, our lives veer off in a direction that takes us away from our core values, leaving us feeling empty and dissatisfied.

If you feel dissatisfied with this area, be honest with yourself about where things seem to be out of alignment. What are the specific areas (work, relationships, lifestyle, etc.) where you feel you're not honouring your core values? What would it take to bring things into alignment?



You probably can't fix things overnight, but you can start formulating a plan and identifying steps that will get you moving in the right direction. It may be difficult (and scary) at first, but once you're engaged in action, you'll gain momentum and make way for opportunities to arise that take you closer to your ultimate goal.

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## **9. Physical Activity**

*Movement is natural for every human being, everywhere on the planet. We're hard-wired to desire and enjoy moving. Infants crawl, then walk, then run. They're not exercising, they're just eager to move!*

*As you get older, regular gentle movement eases achy joints and prevents stiffness. It also sharpens your mind and improves your day-to-day coping ability. Movement benefits your entire being. The key is moving in ways you feel great about, so it's enjoyable and not burdensome.*

*Walking provides a wealth of benefits, and it gets you out in the fresh air. There are also many great online exercise routines—you know you've found a program/instructor that's a good fit for you when it leaves you feeling great about yourself and looking forward to the next session.*

*Find whatever works for you, and make it a regular part of your life.*



## **10. Fun and Leisure**

*What do you love doing? What lights you up and puts a smile on your face? What activity can you lose yourself in, unaware of the time passing? What is it that invigorates you and makes you feel alive?*

*Each person's idea of fun is different. Some people enjoy a calm, relaxing escape; others are looking for the ultimate adrenaline rush.*

*Whatever your tastes, it's important to have some fun in your life to refresh both your body and your soul. These moments of peace, joy and contentment are just as vital to your well-being as the food you eat; they nourish your spirit.*

*Whether you prefer intense outdoor adventures or simply curling up with a cup of tea and a good book, set aside time for some fun activities.*

