

From the Heart...

... Life Skills for Today

By Sharon L. Benedict MS, CLC



What is Wellness?

This question seems simple enough. Yet, there are as many different answers as there are people on our planet! Most of the time, the focus is on losing weight and eating more healthy. We tend to think about our health and wellness in only physical terms...primarily keeping our bodies in shape.

Keeping our bodies in shape is definitely important. Without our health, all other passions and endeavors seem to pale in comparison. There is one very significant benefit when facing health challenges. We slow down and start to really look at what our life is all about. Hopefully, we finally face the *what, where, when and how* questions in our lives.

What is most important to you? Where do you want to go from here? When you are ninety-five years old, what will you want to say about your life and legacy? How would you like to go about seeking, reaching, and achieving your own life goals and unique legacy? We could even add the *who* question. Who do you want to share your life with? This means not only your mate but anyone that crosses your path.

Wellness has everything to do with relationships and your whole life, not just the physical. Among many private and public healthcare entities, the Bravewell Collaborative mission (www.bravewell.org) is to transform our nation's

healthcare with a 21st century integrative healthcare model at its best. This transformation will become reality by “moving the boundaries of the existing field of medicine to include the wisdom inherent in healing the "whole person"—mind, body and spirit. People drawn to integrative medicine—as providers, patients or philanthropists—are attracted to it because their values match those of this approach to health and healing.” You can learn more about our nation’s healthcare transformation by reading a presentation I gave at a regional medical conference (available on the homepage, www.harvestenterprises-sra.com).

Whether the term “wholistic” or “holistic” is familiar to you, both recognize the sacred and healing nature of relationships; and acknowledge compassion and caring are essential to health, healing, and wellness. You are center stage in your own wellness journey. How you deal emotionally, mentally, spiritually with stress and trauma directly affect your level of wellness as well as the risk and course of disease.

Creating an environment which supports healing relationships for both patient and provider is paramount in prevention, wellness, and longevity. We must also acknowledge that many of our chronic and serious illnesses, such as cancer, cardiovascular disease and diabetes, are directly involved in high-risk behavior; and can be reduced with scientifically based nutrition, exercise and stress management (mind-body) interventions.

The answer to this question, *What is Wellness?*, can begin with the following statements. One of our nation’s pioneers in the wellness movement, John W. Travis, MD, offers these axioms to consider:

- Wellness is a Choice—a decision you make to move toward optimal health and well being.
- Wellness is a way of life...a lifestyle you design to achieve your highest potential for well-being.
- Wellness is a process...a developing awareness that there is no end point, but that health and happiness are possible in each moment, here and now.
- Wellness is a balanced channeling of energy...energy received from your environment, transformed within you, and returned to affect the world around you.
- Wellness is the integration of the body, mind, and spirit.... the appreciation that everything you do, and think, and feel, and believe has an impact on your state of health.
- Wellness is the loving acceptance of yourself.

Then add:

- Wellness is RELATIONSHIPS!

Travis reminds us that “CONNECTEDNESS IS THE CURRENCY OF WELLNESS.” The word, Wellness, can also be understood by the fact that WELLNESS starts with WE; ILLNESS starts with I; ISOLATING BEHAVIOR holds us back and HINDERS WELLNESS.

For the next issue, prevention, longevity, and wellness will be covered in more detail with key resources to check out. In the meantime, begin thinking about *What is Wellness?* for you, personally. Do you have a wellness team that

supports your life and wellness goals? Then, share your thoughts with family and friends.

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Choosing Your Wellness Team

For many of us, doctor shopping or choosing a clinic means the local Yellow Pages or your insurance provider list. Yet, doctor shopping encompasses more than a random finger pointing in the Yellow Pages. Finding the “right” wellness team may be a fairly simple one for those who consider themselves healthy and savvy about “The System.” It is definitely more complicated when living with serious health challenges and financial constraints.

Who are your wellness caregivers? Who do you want on your wellness team? Here is where the key attribute of wellness will impact the choices you make—RELATIONSHIPS. I’m not just referring to the importance of having a primary physician. Who do you trust to be your healthcare and wellness advocate? Maybe even your friend? Throughout my own twenty-year wellness journey, my husband always teased that I had more doctor friends than any other! How true at that time in my life! And I’m forever grateful. Yet, there were many other very special caregivers who shared my journey.

Caregivers come in all shapes, sizes, and roles. They may or may not involve a fee. No matter your health challenges, they are your family members, friends, neighbor, church family, coworkers, healthcare providers (e.g. primary care MD, DO, DC, acupuncturist, homeopath, naturopath, nutritionist,

massage/physical therapist, pharmacist/herbalist), fitness trainer, home health aide, hospice, allied wellness services (including professional coaches), even possibly your bowling team!

They do hand-on care and advocacy, provide vital physical, emotional, mental, spiritual support. They routinely send you a special card, clean your house, car pool your kids, pray for you regularly, help with medical needs, business and financial matters, and assist you in staying balanced and focused on those things most important to you in your life. Wellness and caregiving are fundamentally connected through healthy, trusting relationships.

You, therefore, have a central role in choosing the “right” team for your life/wellness goals. Proactive, informed, and savvy self-care is a major component for experiencing the best of our nation’s healthcare and wellness industry. This is particularly important when navigating the diverse hallowed halls of conventional, complementary/alternative (CAM), and integrative medicine.

As you focus on proactive, informed self-care, think **prevention first**. Any steps you take in prevention improve the odds for stopping a major healthcare challenge coming your way. Moving forward in wellness and a longer life starts with prevention. As one of our nation’s wellness pioneers, John W. Travis, MD, offers us a practical view of our healthcare/wellness journey.

As you move through this Illness-Wellness Continuum on the left where illness appears with disability, symptoms and signs, the Treatment Paradigm has its major role. For our current conventional system, when the patient reaches the neutral point where there is no discernible illness or wellness, patient care

typically ends.

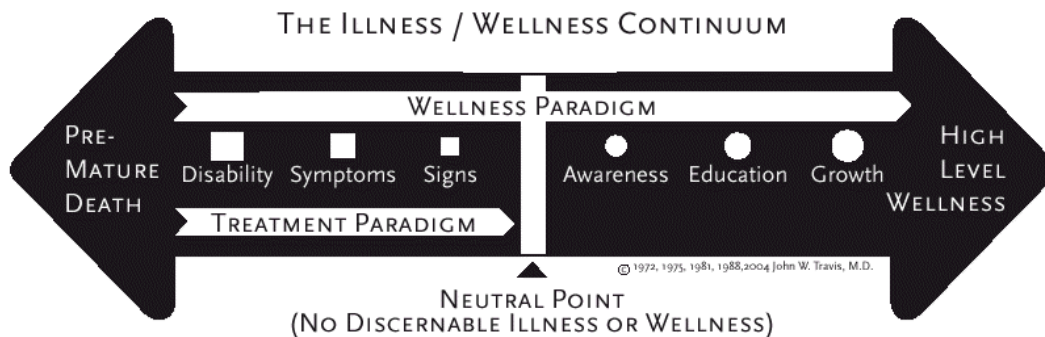


Figure 1. "Reprinted with permission, from Wellness Workbook, 3rd edition, by John W. Travis, MD, and Regina Sara Ryan, Celestial Arts, Berkeley, CA. ©2004 by John W. Travis. www.wellnessworkbook.com

For integrative medicine and the wellness movement, at that point, the journey is just beginning. The healthy patient/client starts to reach for greater awareness, education, and growth toward the highest level of wellness possible—not just physical/medical. Choosing a team that embraces this more inclusive scope of wellness is essential for achieving synergy in every life area. Targeting nutrition, exercise, and stress management are important goals but are short lived without reaching into the lifestyle and need for lasting behavioral changes.

As a life and wellness coach, it's wonderful to see a client seek and reach for healthier changes in their nutrition, exercise, and stress. But even more rewarding is seeing permanent behavioral changes in every life area for which they desire to excel. As clients work through the coaching process, they discover how much their wellness is influenced by the way they use their time, money, career choice, meals (of course), even recreation/entertainment.

Our nation's traditional healthcare centers are just beginning to pick up on these important elements of wellness. However, surprisingly, they still continue to primarily focus on the physical; and are uncertain how to fit non-medical services into a clinical setting. Our insurance companies are also still behind on providing coverage for certain medical prevention/wellness services. In some ways, that just may be a good thing for those who find their insurance company routinely denying coverage under the guise of "what is reasonably acceptable and medically necessary"!

Fortunately, in spite of the challenges, CAM and integrative medical centers are moving ahead—with health-conscious consumer/patients being the driving force seeking these clinical and non-clinical services. As with nutrition, exercise, and stress management programs, testimonials abound on behalf of acupuncture, bioidentical HRT, herbal/nutraceuticals, fitness clubs, spas, and many more. The axiom still holds true for our healthcare system, "Where the consumer and cash go, so goes The System." But ever so slowly. But that doesn't seem to be the case for the cost!

The 2012 projections for conventional medical costs will reach \$3.1 trillion. In addition, CAM/wellness industry's 2010 sales projections are at \$1+ trillion. Each one of us will have a major role in bringing these costs down. Again, prevention will be key to forming your own wellness team.

- Are you ready to become a more informed, proactive consumer/patient?
- Are you ready to design and seek out your own wellness team?
- Are you ready to budget the investment cost into your monthly paycheck?

- What is most important to you and your family?

While you consider these questions, the next issue will focus on wellness in specific areas of nutrition, exercise, and stress. Here are a number of resources to get you started on your wellness journey.

Resources:

Healthy People 2010, <http://www.healthypeople.gov>

National Center for Complementary and Alternative Medicine, <http://nccam.nih.gov>

MedLine Plus, <http://www.medlineplus.org>

Medscape, <http://www.medscape.com>

WebMD, <http://www.webmd.com>

HealthWorld Online, <http://www.healthy.net/>

Consortium of Academic Health Centers for Integrative Medicine, <http://www.imconsortium.org>

The National Wellness Institute, <http://www.nationalwellness.org>

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The Three Wellness Amigos—*Nutrition, Exercise, Stress Management* **Part 1**

Have you thought about the latest statistic in this way? “Now there are more overweight people in America than average-weight people. So, overweight people are now average. Which means you've met your New Year's resolution.” We can thank Jay Leno, comedian & television host, for that gem! Honestly, don't we all try to trick our minds into believing it in order to avoid the obvious?

So, as I get into the nitty-gritty of nutrition, exercise, and stress management, let's not get too serious about the “should's” and “ought to's.” We all know them well. Let's focus on what you are ready to do. From the “inside-out” spotlight those areas you have a clear motivation and commitment for changing the way you eat, exercise, and handle stress.

Remember the questions from the last issue:

- Are you ready to become a more informed, proactive patient/consumer?
- Are you ready to design and seek out your own wellness team?
- Are you ready to budget the cost into your monthly paycheck?
- What is most important to you and your family?

Your answers to these questions will determine how you will fair with making important lifestyle changes.

By 2012, our projected conventional cost will be \$3.1 trillion. According to the CDC Chronic Disease Prevention and Health Promotion, the medical costs for chronic diseases account for 60% of the nation's current \$1+ trillion cost for medical care. Keep in mind that our current and projected costs are primarily caused by high-risk behavior such as tobacco use, high-fat/low fiber foods eating pattern, little or no physical activity, alcohol and substance abuse, avoidance of preventive medical care, violent behavior/injury—**which are all preventable!**

Then consider CAM services. In 1997 alone, \$27 billion were paid out-of-pocket. The 2010 sales projection for the wellness industry is \$1+ trillion! These include a variety of products and services such as nutritional supplements, cosmetic plastic surgery, voluntary eye surgery (LASIK), genetic engineering (sex selection/fertility), preventive medicine, medical savings accounts, high-deductible (wellness) health insurance, fitness clubs/trainers/equipment, voluntary pharmacy products, health food products, weight loss products. Non-clinical services are becoming one of the fastest growing sectors of the wellness industry. The shift to these services is evident even in our beautiful Boerne hill country. Every month, patients and health-conscious consumers are beginning to budget these out-of-pocket costs with every purchase.

While you may be considering voluntary eye surgery (LASIK) for improving your looks, let's first start with the basics on **Nutrition**. Here are five practical pointers for getting back to the basics:

1. EAT WHOLE FOODS.
2. MAKE QUALITY LIVING YOUR LIFE'S GOAL. Feed the whole person—body, soul, spirit.
3. BE AWARE OF PRODUCTS THAT MAY HURT INSTEAD OF HELP. Availability and convenience can sometimes be hazardous to your health. Be an informed health-conscious consumer.
4. PRACTICE MODERATION AND SELF-CONTROL. Attitude and mindset about foods create good and bad habits. Look at what and why you eat what you eat.
5. CHOOSE AN EATING PATTERN THAT SPECIFICALLY FITS YOUR NUTRITIONAL NEEDS. Chemical individuality is what makes us physically unique. Your needs are specific to you. Learn how your body functions in order to make appropriate choices.

Unhealthy habits such as high fat/salt/sugar, tobacco smoking/chewing, and excessive alcohol interfere with nutritional absorption, utilization, and compromise your immune function. If you tend to eat and drink foods that are high in fat, salt, and sugar, are you ready to make a change? If you smoke or chew tobacco, are you ready to quit? If you know you drink too much alcohol, including wine, are you ready to slow down or eliminate it completely?

No matter where you search for nutritional advice, most agree that quality nutrition is foundational to good health. The mystery seems to begin with what type of dietary or eating pattern to choose. Well known advocates for healthy eating, from the USDA (<http://www.mypyramid.gov>) to Andrew Weil, MD, basically advise us to eat a sensible diet that includes balanced portions of complex carbohydrates, essential fatty acids, and lean protein—plus lots of water.

Balanced portions typically range from 40-50% complex carbs, 10-20% lean animal/vegetable protein, and no more than 30% fats. Fats are not bad; only certain types are off the list. Olive oil and certain oils from nuts/seeds, such as walnuts, flax, sunflower are typically recommended. This is also true for carbs. The best are low-glycemic and complex. These foods digest slowly, keep blood sugar even, and increase your vitamin/mineral/fiber uptake. Examples include beans, winter squash, sweet potatoes, whole grains, leafy greens, and whole fruits. For proteins, the emphasis is certain fish, lean meat, few cheeses, and a variety of vegetable protein sources.

These nutrition basics are, of course, determined by the quality as well as quantity you consume, with exercise. In addition, your own unique health condition, age, gender, emotional state, supplement and medication/drug use play major roles in any eating pattern. I encourage you to start with changing your food habits before stepping into any particular supplement plan; and that you inform your primary physician on what you are taking. Food/supplement/drug interactions create positive as well as negative results. A biomedical nutritionist will prove an asset when planning the best coordinated regimen for your wellness needs.

Next issue will finish out this month's topic with tips on the other two wellness amigos—exercise and stress management. You will also learn how to become your doctor's favorite patient!

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The Three Wellness Amigos Part 2

Exercise

For those who hate this word, take comfort in the possibility that you may be already getting plenty of exercise by jumping to conclusions, pushing your luck, and dodging deadlines! If you laughed at this one, you are already exercising your muscles and joints, as well as your funny bone!

Exercise is one of those more guilt-ridden “should’s” for which we never seem to have time. Yet, as with changing our eating pattern, getting to the place where you actually “love” to exercise only happens from the “inside-out.” To more easily get there, what activities do you really love that require active movement and flexibility? Then add a few more simple routines, like walking up stairs instead of the elevator, do short-trip walking errands or on your bicycle, take dancing lessons, swimming lessons, take up a sport you love.

Once you begin these types of routines, a fitness club may be the next step. For many, a fitness center provides the motivational environmental to keep moving, particularly in summer heat and winter downpours. Having a friend join in ups the staying power too. You may also enjoy a fitness trainer along side to help target your needs and achieve lasting goals. Of course, if you have any

particular health condition or limitation, involve your physician in designing an exercise routine. In fact, since the word “exercise” tends to make most of us groan, from now on, let’s change to the word “**movement.**” It’s amazing how changing to the word “movement” broadens the options and improves the attitude. Try whatever works for you; then add another notch to your immune boosting benefits.

Stress Management

When it comes to relieving stress and living in contentment, put the word “choice” in the middle. Whether you are stuck in a mess or living abundantly in the moment, choice is there. Again, your belief about yourself, others, even God form your core values and impact how you show up at work, home, and every relationship. Believe it or not, your belief determines whether being fired from your job is a good thing or a bad thing!

One of the first steps toward managing stress and making choices is to be authentic with yourself and others. Be honest with what is going on inside. Determine from the “inside” to reshape your beliefs, presumptions, and attitudes. Learn how to communicate with those you love through *active/genuine listening, respecting others, suspending judgments, and finding your own voice.*

What does this mean? It means you listen from the heart what others say, respecting them as a human being while setting aside your own judgments and defenses, and then voicing your own heart without an agenda to control or debate. When you experience this type of dialogue, you will then make room for life’s possibilities and healthy relationships. Once you begin this journey of

rediscovery, the negative impact of stress will begin to diminish. Stress will always challenge our lives because it is life's reality. Stress can be positive or negative—opportunities and difficulties both produce stress.

Stress is our signal that *Change* is actually taking place from the inside, challenging us to look at our *Choices*. How we respond to change, again, reflects our attitude and belief. How do you want to make your first step toward less stress in your life? I encourage you to take inventory of where you are today. You can utilize a number of assessments.

- Holmes-Rahe Stress Test (latest version, *A Recent Life Changes Stress Test*, <http://www.drrahe.com/products.php>).
- Free TestWell.org assessment at www.harvestenterprises-sra.com; just click on National Wellness Institute and link to TestWell free assessments.
- Comprehensive year-long self-care Wellness Inventory Program (fee-based) at www.harvestenterprises-sra.com; click on the Wellness Inventory Program logo and follow instructions.

Elizabeth Scott, one of About.com's Guides, offers a variety of stress relieving tips:

- Journaling improve cognitive function, reduces certain health challenges and helps you process difficult problems
- Meditation/prayer offers your mind an opportunity to become quiet and mindful of the moment
- Talk with a friend
- Do artwork

- Positive affirmations
- Learning to say “no”

I would add to these tips:

- Improve sleep pattern
- Exercise and eat healthy
- Improve breathing pattern
- Get a therapeutic massage
- Take a break and have some fun

As these three wellness areas—nutrition, movement, stress management—become intimate friends, the benefits experienced will continue to surprise you. Seek out those who share your desire and even passion for a healthier, more vibrant life. Share the journey together.

In order to round out your wellness amigos, how about becoming your doctor’s favorite patient? You may then find your doc will more proactively help you build your wellness team in nutrition, “movement”, and stress management. Here are a few tips to get you started:

- 1. Complete your patient history forms in advance.**
- 2. Clearly state verbally and in writing your thoughts and concern.**
- 3. Write down the results of your consultation, including tests ordered, w/ risks and benefits understood.**
- 4. Become an informed, proactive patient in conventional, CAM, and integrative medicine; connect with your physician’s local hospital.**
- 5. Know your insurance plan in detail; routinely review for any changes.**
- 6. Start your medical records notebook—include whole history, test results, medications, supplements, insurance, resources, personal notes.**
- 7. Communication is key to a satisfying patient-professional relationship.**
- 8. Final Thought—Wise decisions are never made in haste.**

Give time to consider all options, particularly when learning an entirely new approach to healthcare and wellness. The unknown tends to create more anxiety than the known. Remember, wellness starts with proactive self-care. So, ask until you are satisfied with what you hear. Next issue will begin a new month on creating family fun, appetizing, and nutritional *Meals*.

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