

From the Heart. . .

. . . Life Skills for Today

By Sharon L. Benedict MS, ACC



The “We” of Wellness

“Do all the good you can, By all the means you can, In all the ways you can, In all the places you can, At all the times you can, To all the people you can, As long as ever you can.” John Wesley’s Rule of Life tells us not only how we treat others but also how we need to care for ourselves. We can do all good for others only when we are first good to ourselves. Wellness makes that vital connection.

Wellness starts with “We.” Illness starts with “I.” What does that tell us about seeking, reaching, and achieving wellness? Wellness is embraced when we get connected with others—not just our doctors or fitness trainer, but also family, friends, neighbors. Wellness is about relationships that support your desire for the highest level of health and well-being. Wellness encourages us to reach for “wholeness” in every life area. I see the “I” in Illness as tempting us to isolate ourselves from getting help and support. Isolating behavior only holds us back and hinders wellness.

Yet, it’s not so easy to find the right kind of help at times. A health challenge or illness often times also brings the fear of the unknown. What if I hear a scary diagnosis? Won’t I feel better if I just ignore it? Won’t it just go away in time? One of George Dennison Prentice’s 1860 quotes may just fit here. “What some call health, if purchased by perpetual anxiety about diet, isn’t much better than tedious disease.”

If we are in perpetual anxiety about our state of health and well being, whether it's our diet, exercise, stress, or some ailment, would good does that do us? So, how do we approach our wellness journey with the right perspective, particularly if we are dealing with some health condition? I may seek my physician, a nutritionist, a massage therapist, or cruise through the internet for an hour or two. Yet, I have learned over the years what Albert Schweitzer stated long ago. "Every patient carries her or his own doctor inside."

I believe you do have the capacity to hear your body speak to you in such a way that you can actually teach your physician to do his or her job even better. Your ability to listen begins with facing and releasing any fear, learning how your body functions, and making a choice to seek support tailored just for you. This choice has everything to do with your "want to." When you know you are ready to make changes, the "want to" shows up. You are then ready to start your wellness journey and get connected.

Wellness is a conscious, purposeful choice toward seeking your optimal well-being—not simply the absence of illness, but an improved quality of life that supports physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual health in all relationships. The National Wellness Institute's definition is "Wellness is a conscious, self-directed and evolving process of achieving full potential. Wellness is a multi-dimensional and holistic, encompassing lifestyle, mental and spiritual well-being, and the environment. Wellness is positive and affirming."

The NWI (<http://www.nationalwellness.org>) offers a Six Dimensional Model where a person becomes aware of the interconnectedness of each dimension and

how they contribute to healthy living. This “wholistic” wellness model brings together the physical, intellectual, emotional, spiritual, social, and occupational elements of your life. The focus is how you contribute to your environment and community, build better living spaces and social networks, how you enrich your life through your chosen work and its interconnectedness to living and playing, and how you develop your belief systems, values, and creating a world-view. In addition, this model helps you see the benefits of regular physical activity, healthy eating habits, strength and vitality as well as personal responsibility, self-care and when to seek medical attention; self-esteem, self-control, and determination as a sense of direction; and creative, stimulating mental activities, and sharing your gifts with others.

In the next couple articles, I will offer another Wellness Dimension model that not only supports these six NWI dimensions but offers more detail with twelve dimensions of wellness. You can also learn more about this program through my website (www.harvestenterprises-sra.com). The *Wellness Inventory Program* was developed by John W. Travis, MD, one of our nation’s pioneers in the wellness movement for more than thirty years. In collaboration with Health World Online, this Wellness Inventory is a unique multi-faceted wellness program encompassing *Self-Responsibility, Breathing, Sensing, Eating/Food, Movement, Feelings/Emotion, Thinking, Playing & Working, Communicating, Intimacy/Sex, Finding Meaning, and Transcending/Faith.*

Until next time, remember, there is no absolute, fixed level of wellness. Wellness is a continuing journey that embraces balance in every life area, and is unique to you and your needs. There are as many different roads to wellness, as there

are people. Commit the time to find your path and those to share the journey with you. Do not wait for a better day, make today your better day. I encourage you to embrace these basic tenets of wellness as you begin your journey:

- ✓ Wellness is a choice.... a decision you make to move toward optimal health.
- ✓ Wellness is a way of life...a journey, 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 the 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.
- ✓ Wellness is RELATIONSHIPS! Again, Wellness is Relationships—

“CONNECTEDNESS IS THE CURRENCY OF WELLNESS”

John W. Travis, MD

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12 Dimensions of Wellness Part 1

What does Wellness mean to you? Does it just mean you need to lose some weight or choose more healthy meals? Or is it much more than just body care? As important as our physical needs are, we can't deny our emotional, mental, and spiritual well being is also at stake.

I think we all know Wellness is "Wholistic" in its meaning and practice. Yet, even in the 21st century, our healthcare, even wellness, centers still primarily focus on the physical. There are a few major medical centers beginning to ask their patients to proactively consider a variety of lifestyle influences on their physical health. The focus starts with exercise, nutrition, and stress management. Then add weight loss and smoking cessation programs, accompanied by a few centers with lifestyle and wellness coaching. Ever so slowly, our healthcare system is beginning to see the light. But for proactive, health-conscious consumers and patients, they are far ahead of the system. These consumer/patient pioneers know what wellness is all about.

Among many wellness models used by our nation's healthcare centers, the *Wellness Inventory Program* developed by John W. Travis, MD, is one of the top tools for seeking, reaching, and achieving the highest level of wellness. This Wellness

Inventory is a pioneering "whole person" assessment program designed to help you gain personal insight into your state of physical, emotional, and spiritual wellness. The program identifies your areas of strength, the specific areas in which you are most motivated to change, and guides you in creating a wellness action plan based upon your personal motivations.

The Wellness Inventory also provides tools, resources, services to help you reach your wellness goals and bring more balance into your life. Many well-respected, renowned medical practitioners have applauded this program as an invaluable, powerful tool for our 21st century integrative healthcare as well as a fundamental component of numerous hospital wellness services.

According to Kent W. Peterson, MD (former director, American College of Preventive Medicine), "The Wellness Inventory pushes beyond health risk appraisals to the wellness dimension . . . This self-assessment tool offers new insights into what makes life worth living, and loving, and breathing. Medical care will never bring you to the brink of joyfulness, zest for life, and treating the environment responsibly. The Wellness Inventory puts the health back into health care."

In collaboration with Health World Online, this Wellness Inventory encompasses 12 dimensions of a wellness energy system (input and output) all in synergy with one another: *Self-Responsibility, Breathing, Sensing, Eating/Food, Movement, Feelings/Emotion, Thinking, Playing & Working, Communicating, Intimacy/Sex, Finding Meaning, and Transcending/Faith.*

Self-responsibility, with love and compassion, are choices that create an environment, or context, within which all other energy expressions can be considered.

Self-responsibility and love flow from the appreciation that we are not separate and individual entities, nor are we made up of separate parts. Rather, we are united in one energy system with everything else in creation. This means that every choice we make about our own bodies and lives impact our children, neighbors next door, and the world we live in.

Breathing is synonymous with living. It is basic to our energy-transforming metabolism. Breathing is the first of three energy inputs in the Wellness Energy System. The oxygen it provides is needed for the production of the high-energy chemical bonds that result when it combines with our blood sugar within every cell of our body. Much of our capacity for energy and brain function is influenced by how we breathe while exercising and at rest. The breath may also provide more subtle energies or “life force” not yet completely understood or recognized by our western science.

Sensing—sensory information (light, heat, touch, sound, odor, taste, movement, etc.) is the second form of energy input in the Wellness Energy System. Vast amounts of energy are received from our environment and channeled by our physical senses, and possibly through other less well-understood senses. These energies are necessary for our protection and survival, and serve as our most basic form of communication. We are often unaware of the impact of these senses, even take them for granted every day.

Eating/Food is our third form of energy input (including digestion and assimilation). Eating is the process whereby molecules are extracted from food, combusted with the oxygen supplied by breathing, and transformed into

electrochemical and heat energy. These newly acquired molecules are also used in the production of raw materials needed for building and repairing body parts. The old adage, "We are what we eat" still holds true. So, if food quantity and quality are not consciously chosen in balance with one another, our ability to properly digest and assimilate food is considerably limited; and directly impacts energy, muscle, and brain function.

Next issue will cover the following four wellness dimensions: *Movement, Feelings/Emotion, Thinking, Playing & Working*. You can learn more about this valuable wellness program at my website, www.harvestenterprises-sra.com. In the meantime, ask yourself this question: **How can I more consciously improve my commitment to *Self-Responsibility, Breathing, Sensing, Eating/Food*?** Then begin to take one action this week to support your commitment to your choices and expression of love to others; more conscious awareness of your breathing and sensing abilities; and improved food choices and environment for healthy eating routines.

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12 Dimensions of Wellness Part 2

When you say the word “exercise” what first comes to mind? Guilt? Maybe, “I just don’t have the time?” Or, “I get lots of exercise walking from my car, picking up my toddler, mowing the lawn, and cleaning the house. So, who needs a dedicated time to pump iron?” If any of these works for you, then let’s think about changing the word to *Movement*.

Within the twelve dimensions of the wellness energy system being covered this month (developed by John W. Travis, MD, a renowned wellness movement pioneer for the past thirty years), *Movement* offers a much less phobic response to getting our bodies in aerobic motion on a regular basis. As a lifestyle/wellness coach, I much prefer to encourage creative ways to move the body than to confront a client with only strict and often narrow exercise regimens. It’s a lot more fun to see walking, dancing or rumba lessons, and bicycling included in the many possibilities—beyond getting on a treadmill or pumping iron (as valid as these activities are for many).

Movement is a most basic expression of energy output in the Wellness Energy System. Nourished and stimulated with oxygen, sensory data, and food-fuels, the body responds with internal movement; lungs expanding and contracting, heart

pumping, etc., and external movement; smiling, walking, etc. The ability to move is the basis for more complex bodily activities such as working and playing, creative expression, communication, and even intimacy/sexual activity.

The next three wellness energy system dimensions covered in this article are *Feelings/Emotion, Thinking, Playing & Working*. **Feelings or emotion—fear, sadness, joy, anger**—is an important form of human energy output. Feelings are generated from within the limbic system of the brain, and serve to motivate both thought and action. We respond to any given event with thoughts and feelings. Yet, most of us give more priority to our thoughts about a subject and ignore our feelings. Sometimes, we get confused about what we may be feeling. We can feel angry and sad at the same time, angry and fearful, or happy and sad, with one only slightly predominating over the other. Feelings are instantaneous in most all situations. There are also different feelings styles that come from our personality and life experience. Some may be able to express feelings more easily while others suppress and are silent with them.

Travis in his Wellness Workbook offers an exercise in feelings that has been invaluable to him. “While looking through my baby book I closely examined some of the photos and saw indications of that inner beauty in myself as a child, a presence and light that I had forgotten or didn’t know was there. I took some of the pictures out of the book, had them enlarged, and arranged them so I could see those parts of myself I had forgotten or disowned, and reincorporate them into my self-image.” Understanding who we really are since childhood along with our personality helps us to gain compassion, both for ourselves and for others. This exercise will assure you of

how unique and special you are and that you do not have to fit in with only one set of prevailing norms.

Yet, with all feelings, we must reflect on we respond to those feelings; how we deal with anger, sadness, guilt, fear, even joy in all our relationships. When we consciously are aware of our feelings and how to appropriate respond, we then begin to experience life without all the “shoulds” and “oughts” ruling our daily thoughts, feelings, and actions. When actions are extrinsically driven we do what others tell us to do. When our actions are intrinsic and comes from within ourselves, we generate “want to’s” that support lasting behavioral change. This process is important to embrace with each day as you give appropriate attention to your feelings.

Thinking is a form of electrochemical energy generated in the brain, and is a type of energy output. While it requires all the energy input sources, thinking is particularly dependent upon sensory data, and relies heavily on the energy of emotions in creating its internal maps of external reality. Thinking is the art and the craft of the human brain and soul. “We feed the brain both with nutrients carried by the blood and energy from millions of daily impressions gleaned from what we read in books, watch on television, learn from other people, and experience in sights, sounds, and movement.”

This flowing energy fuels our brain signals, nerves, and everything through our bodies, even dreams. Thinking molds our experiences, shapes our own realities, and even can change our bodies. Yet, we need to wisely consider what we decide to program ourselves to believe and think about. To program wellness into your think, Travis offers ways to embrace response-able and creative means for dealing with

counterproductive thinking or worry. First, **recognize the worry—be aware. Ask whose problem it is—mine or others. If the problem is yours, take one small step** by pausing for a moment and determine if there is any action you could take right now that would improve the situation you are worrying about. You will then free yourself from a backlog of procrastination that drains energy, slowing down brain function, and creating greater tension. **Then take one small step again and again and again** that offers a healthy, nurturing image or affirmation. Be creative with each step by coming up with new ways to work with them.

Postpone worry when not all the facts are in. **Grieve when nothing will change** and there seems to be nothing anyone can do about the situation that is disturbing you, ever! When the thought returns, just take a few moments to acknowledge the loss you are feeling; then open your heart to the next moment through comforting prayer or a broader perspective about the struggles of people around the world. **Then practice gratitude for what is.** Focus on what you do have and give attention to the gifts and grace around you. **Forgive yourself** for any failures, difficulties, or pressures experienced while trying to change your mindset direction.

The next wellness dimension is ***Playing and Working***. This dimension involves directed, focused, energy expressions. The energy of thinking and communicating, enhanced by the energy of movement, combine to create a form in which human beings interact with others and their environment, produce goods and services, and structure their time, and thus their lives. When you create balance between playing and working, every day becomes more fulfilling, purposeful, and playful. When you think of playing consider it re-creation—to make new, to vitalize again, to inspire with

life and energy. This is “creativity” at its best—“an attitude you create at any time, in any place, that transforms the mundane into the divine, the boring into the joyful, the required into the desired, and the present moment into a sacrament.” You then conserve and add energy to your often frenetic activity.

We are encouraged to redefine our play to be less competitive and more cooperative, begin to chill out and not take play so seriously, and allow laughter in play to promote health and wellness in our lives. Feel free to carry this over to your work to alleviate the grind, stress, and distorted view that your work is your sole identity. Until next week when the last four dimensions will be covered—*Communicating, Intimacy/Sex, Finding Meaning, and Transcending/Faith*—remember, you are more than your occupation and skills. You are a unique, powerful, and beautiful human being waiting to more fully discover who you really are.

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12 Dimensions of Wellness Part 3

Throughout this month the focus has been on twelve dimensions of wellness developed over twenty-five years ago by John W. Travis, MD, one of our nation's premier wellness movement pioneers. The first eight were Self-responsibility & Love, Breathing, Sensing, Eating/Food, Movement, Feeling, Thinking, Playing & Working. The final four are *Communicating, Intimacy/Sex, Finding Meaning, and Transcending/Faith*. As you reflect on each dimension, it becomes obvious how each dimension builds and vitally interacts within this wellness energy system.

Communicating is the organization of feeling and thinking energy and their transmission in the form of a message, verbal or non-verbal. Communicating is an energy output that allows us to share our internal maps of reality with others, and thus forms the foundation of culture and community. Communicating is also *dialogue* where relationships are developed and also challenged. In ***Crucial Conversations, Tools for Talking When Stakes are High***, authored by Kerry Patterson, crucial conversations are about tough issues. They may not only be challenging, frustrating, annoying, even frightening, but "the results could have a huge impact on the quality of your life," for better or worse. While emotions run high in these types of conversations,

Patterson believes “If you know how to handle (even master) crucial conversations, you can step up to and effectively hold tough conversations about virtually any topic.” William Isaacs, author of ***Dialogue, the Art of Thinking Together***, and founder of the Dialogue project at MIT agrees. “In a dialogue, people are not just interacting, but creating together”—forever transforming the person, relationship, career, organization, and community. Dialogue is a living experience of inquiry *within* and *between* people.

One key tenet for experiencing genuine dialogue is the premise that when communicating with each other, you are actually creating together something you can not do alone. This kind of creative dialogue requires certain behaviors to exist when communicating.

These behaviors consist of certain skills essential as key building blocks for transformational dialogue and lasting behavioral change. These skills are:

Authentic listening (active, intentional, quiet)

Respecting others (organizational structure, individuals)

Suspending judgment (agenda, hidden motives)

Voicing (finding your own voice; what is true for you; individual & corporate voice)

With these skills, communicating creates a **fluid environment for dialogue**. Within the group, each person needs to use these skills throughout the dialogue process.

Without them, we end up trying very hard to defend our position, control others, and feed perpetual debate without consensus or resolution. With these behavior skills, we embrace the process and create a safe environment for dialogue. This is particularly essential with the wellness dimension of intimacy.

Intimacy/Sex is one of the significantly active manifestations of the many functions of the human body, mind, and spirit. Sex is about the preservation of life—a type of communication in which the entire organism attempts to unify itself with another. Yet, sex is also intricately involved with our most basic human need—**Intimacy**. Intimacy and the sex act are dynamically dependent upon and strongly modified by a variety of physical (breath, sensation, food/fuel), emotional/mental (thoughts, feelings, and messages), and spiritual (belief system/mindset) energy input sources for its complete expression to be whole and truly intimate. Experiencing safe and whole intimacy with relationship directly depend on the synergy between your spiritual faith, emotions, intellect, and physical dynamics. In addition, whatever we experience in our early growing up years can support, hinder, or almost destroy our capacity for this kind of synergy in intimacy. Who you choose to connect with any degree of intimacy will, therefore, impact every arena of your life. So, choose wisely as you seek to find meaning in your life's journey.

Finding Meaning involves a complex energy output of all previous energy forms. It involves the basic questions: Who am I? Why am I here? Where am I going? What do I want? What is real? What is true? Regardless of whether these questions are conscious or unconscious, all life activity, all other energy expressions, are colored by them. The ongoing process of addressing these questions encourages a balanced life and provides us with a focal point toward which to direct our energy. Finding meaning in life means you seek to know your core values, and set your foundation in all relationships and your life. This foundation has everything to do with what we experience each day and even more beyond our intellect, our physical senses, our

attitudes and perceptions about people and things around us. It is much more than what we think, feel, touch, and see—it is about transcending.

Transcending/Faith is the movement in which all energies, once experienced as separate types and in individual contexts, are appreciated as one. Put another way, we come to know that we are connected and impacted by all around us. Every part of our being is encoded with the desire to **go beyond** just what we see and feel. We are infused with this energy in the “whole” of all life. This life connection is programmed into our being, our very DNA, and intuitively draws us in search of the source of all life, to be truly “one” with the God of the universe—the creator and sustainer of all energy.

This knowledge inspires both love and self-responsibility, which takes us full circle in the never-ending spiral of wellness. This wellness journey doesn't hold back every limitation, old age or inevitable death for us all but makes the journey considerably more pleasant. . .a journey offering a greater measure of purpose, fulfillment, and joy in living well. As you ponder these last four dimensions, may you embrace the true meaning of wellness for yourself and those you love and care for.