

# *From the Heart. . .*

## *. . . Life Skills for Today*

*By Sharon L. Benedict MS, ACC*



## **Wellness—A Choice Worth Winning**

(published in Boerne Star, Friday, July 2, 2010)

When you think of Wellness, what gets your greatest attention? Losing weight, lowering your cholesterol, coping with diabetes? Wellness embodies just about everything you do each day that either support or hinders a healthy lifestyle of wellness and wellbeing.

This month's articles will focus on the basic elements of genuine wellness. The first is what John W. Travis, MD offers in his Wellness Workbook: "Wellness is a choice" . . . *a decision you make to move toward optimal health.* What move you to make a choice? Is it something from the outside that pressures you to do it? Are the shoulds the drivers in your life? Or are your choices made from the inside? Do you make that choice because you "want to" instead "should?" There is a very real difference between the two. Extrinsic relies on the end product, recycling old behavioral patterns. You may even see your choice as reducing risk of disease, controlling/losing weight because your physician told you to. You may even decide extrinsically for enhanced fitness. You are basically future oriented and know you "have to" because someone told you to.

Intrinsic choice looks on the process. It sustains lasting behavioral change and feels good. You enjoy yourself and experience fun in the flow and stimulation. You have pleasure in learning and are curious; therefore, you seek mastery. You are in the

moment/present. You just plain “want to” because you believe it is right for you...not your neighbor, your spouse, but you.

See the distinction? Choosing to reach for the highest level of wellness in your life is only sustained when your intrinsic motivators are more than extrinsic. Remember, though, we all have extrinsic motivators, and they have a place in our lives. Sometimes, we just need to be shaken just a little to start contemplating the road to wellness as a personal life goal. And sometimes, the quake in our lives can be scary, such as the chilling word “cancer.” That’s when understanding genuine wellness and your intrinsic motivators become even more essential.

Think about your motivators this week. What drives your intrinsic motivators and cultivate them in each area of your life? In the next article, the focus will be on “Wellness is a way of life...*a lifestyle you design to achieve your highest potential for well-being.* Stay tuned.

Sharon L. Benedict, MS, ACC, is a certified life wellness coach-consultant, specializing in life skills, wellness, and creative arts development for individuals, businesses and organizations ([www.harvestenterprises-sra.com](http://www.harvestenterprises-sra.com)).She welcomes your questions and comments and can be contacted at [seekreachachieve@gvtc.com](mailto:seekreachachieve@gvtc.com).

# *From the Heart. . .*

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### **Wellness—facing life along the way**

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“Wellness is a way of life” . . . *a lifestyle you design to achieve your highest potential for wellbeing.* John W. Travis, MD, author of the classic text *Wellness Workbook*, offers us this additional perspective on what is wellness. Yet, the way our lives go sometimes doesn’t make the path an easy one.

What we inherited, both genetically and relationally, from our parents and grandparents often bear witness to our understanding and capacity for achieving wellness in our lives. For myself, I grew up in the midst of the post World War II drive to prosperity and the suburban life. The men returned from war to find their wives and world different than when they left. Those who stayed home like my parents also had unique challenges and frustrations in their lives.

During the 1950’s, there seemed to surface a deep separation between the two generations covering the decades of the 40s and 50s. While the media, music, and politics tried to portray a wonderland of unity and progress, underneath was brewing the 60’s seeds of a not so friendly world. The lives of families seemed to be shaped more by the media portrayal than by the families themselves. Families seemed to keep to themselves and work hard at conforming to that media image before the public. The media blend was Mom, the homemaker, and Dad, the provider. And nothing was to be

said that shook that picture.

Although I am sure there were exceptions with some families, many followed the media trail. My family was no different. Even when questions were broached, silence or shunning the inquiry was the usual response from parents. Family discussions were never a part of the package. Silence was golden to them. As a result, I knew very little about my parents' lives before or after their marriage. Only in my Mom's senior years after Dad died, was she more willing to talk about her life. And only then did I begin to understand and put the pieces together.

Add the "Hollywood" scene of my father working as a division administrator for Paramount Studios, you then have a scenario of a mixed up childhood. There were always good memories mixed with the bad. And I am forever grateful for the faith my Mom instilled in me to hope and believe that life is worth living and loving. When it came to going to the studio and watch actors such as John Wayne, Jerry Lewis, or meet the Bonanza stars, I was always curious to see and meet the performers whenever I got a chance!

As I looked back as a young adult at my own journey, I came face to face with the shadows and secrets of childhood abuse, a cascading list of medical mysteries, and family tragedies. My odyssey to solve those medical mysteries challenged me to look at life's horizon with a broader stroke—one life forever changed by the gift of my faith in God, the impact of family on my physical, emotional, spiritual well being, and the healing miracle of forgiveness. In my autobiography, *In Daddy's Eyes*, I term those years "the body keeps score." And it surely did.

At the grand age of 36 memories flooded me that gave me a choice. Do I just lie

down, not to rise again? Or do I face life along the way as my story revisited my yesterdays, holding hope and healing for my tomorrows?

I chose to rise up and begin my own personal wellness journey as I faced a progressively deteriorating body for seemingly inexplicable reasons. The pain was continuous, and life was becoming a seemingly unsolvable mystery. Sharon came to a stop! Yet, I began to discover a whole new life of faith and hope. Every day became a brand new day filled with challenges and opportunities to solve my many “medical mysteries,” traveling the meandering maze of conventional and alternative medicine. Basically, I was told I had an “inborn error of metabolism” causing my body to progressively deteriorate—with an inability to digest food properly; thereby, wasting away.

With the wonderful help of integrative healthcare providers through the years, every area of my life was touched--what I ate, drank, and breathed, just to name a few basics. Almost thirty years later, wellness and wellbeing are an integral part of my life and passion for my family, friends, clients, and colleagues. The disciplines I embraced have now, thirty years later, become a natural part of my lifestyle. Wellness has become my way of life, even when new challenges surprise me.

Life’s challenges also accompany our journey of wellness and wellbeing. Conscious purpose, peace, and contentment are possible when we face all of life along the way through the eyes of hope and proactive choice. Travis offers this perspective with this other wellness facet, to be covered next time—“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.*

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# *From the Heart. . .*

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*By Sharon L. Benedict MS, ACC*



### **Wellness—enjoying the process**

(published in Boerne Star, Friday, July 16, 2010)

*“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.* It’s so easy for us to focus just on the end product . . . losing that ten or twenty pounds or running five miles four days per week. We often lose sight of the journey that took us there. And we are usually just relieved to have arrived!

Was it hard? Was it torturous? Or did it actually feel good, and was it fun for the most part? Whether torturous or terrific, health and happiness is possible when the process or journey is fully embraced. What does that really mean? We all have certain goals each day and throughout our lives. Yet, if anxiety and frustration accompany you on the journey, it definitely isn’t any fun. You may reach your initial goal but lose the joy of fulfillment that sustains the momentum. As the momentum and motivation wanes, reaching optimal wellness is all the harder.

So, how do you not only get in the mood but also stay there? There are two essential hints mentioned above—1) awareness that there is no end point, and 2) health & happiness are in each moment, here and now. No matter the challenges, you may reach a desired goal next month, next year. Then you have tomorrow, next month, next year. The magic and mystery of achieving big, bold goals, even achieving greatness is

held in each moment with each small thing honored and cared for. All our lives are filled with daily small things—buying groceries, make the sale, paying the bills, walking up stairs, making beds, washing the dishes, watering the garden. Goals and greatness remain an abstraction and fantasy until we honor the small, simple things in each moment. These seemingly small things fuel and actually determine the future. The wonder of living is to see the magical connection between with your here & now.

When someone thoughts and actions are more on the past and the future, they may also have more anxiety, procrastinate, tend to avoid risk, and even be a little absent-minded. Often times, you may hear the ethereal words such as “Sure, someday.” They may even be on their treadmill right now running those five miles. Yet, their thoughts are on how they are going to make next month’s rent. Their facial expressions may even seem disconnected, complaining, and critical. How does it feel to be around someone like this? Do you feel drained yourself, almost like it’s contagious? Well, it can be.

So, here is your opportunity to possibly help your friend by asking “What do you want to do today to get you in the moment as you move toward your “someday” goal? Then share what you are going to do today to embrace and enjoy the process that will be your future—where all things, big and small share the journey of a lifetime.

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# *From the Heart...*

## *... Life Skills for Today*

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### **Wellness—sharing it with the world around you**

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*“Wellness is a balanced channeling of energy”*...energy received from the environment, transformed within you, and returned to affect the world around you.

What a mystery and marvelous part of life! When we choose to live a life of wellness we receive a special dose of “get-up-and-go” energy from just about everything we do each day.

This next key element of genuine wellness offered by John W. Travis, MD, hints at a few questions to ponder. How’s your environment today? Does it energize you or suck the life out of you? It’s amazing how thoughts alone can impact the level of emotional as well as physical energy we experience. Endless streams of thought run through our head every day. These automatic thoughts can be positive or negative. They also come from logic and reason. Others may crop up from misconceptions created from lack of information.

In a Mayo Clinic online article on positive thinking and stress (May 30, 2009), another question was offered. “Is your glass half-empty or half-full?” Your answer to this classic question may actually reflect your outlook on life, attitude toward yourself, and whether you're optimistic or pessimistic. Even personality styles lean toward one or

the other and can affect many areas of your health and wellbeing. Practicing positive thinking is paramount to effective stress management. This doesn't mean you ignore life's challenges. It means you approach those challenges in a more positive and productive way.

Here are just a few benefits offered by the Mayo Clinic:

- Increased life span
- Lower rates of depression
- Lower levels of distress
- Greater resistance to the common cold
- Better psychological and physical wellbeing
- Reduced risk of death from cardiovascular disease
- Better coping skills during hardships and times of stress

Whether from having a positive outlook, a healthier lifestyle, or both, the benefits enable you to better manage stressful situations, thereby reducing the harmful health effects on your body. These benefits also embody Travis' this next wellness definition. "*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.

Mayo Clinic considers that positive and optimistic people live healthier lifestyles — they get more physical activity, follow a healthier diet, and have reduced rates of smoking and alcohol consumption. So, as you consider these additional definitions of

wellness, start planning how you can create for yourself a more balanced channel of energy from your every day environment. Your environment represents your physical and relational surroundings at work, home, wherever you are—what you breathe, touch, hear, see, and even how you sit and move.

The energy you receive from your environment is transformed within you as positive or negative. And whatever you say, wherever you go, whether in the grocery store, in a board meeting, or at home fixing dinner, that transformed energy affecting your health & wellbeing will return to affect the world around you.

One way to begin to more positively impact your thoughts, attitude, and environment is to be around positive people whose lives are productive and contribute to the wellbeing of others. Their positive outlook and creative capabilities will be contagious. Also, seek out experts in the field of wellness from an integrative medical perspective—focusing on the whole person. You will then begin to experience transformative energy that will support genuine wellness in every area of your life.

For the next article, the concluding elements of wellness will be covered. And these two can, surprisingly, be a challenge for many of us.

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# *From the Heart...*

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## **Wellness—knowing and loving say it all**

(published in Boerne Star, Friday, July 30, 2010)

“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.” These two additional wellness definitions round out the wellness world for John W. Travis, MD.

Yes, everything you think, say, and do impact your whole being—body, mind/soul, spirit. So, when you woke up this morning, what was your first thought? Did it encourage you to rise to a fresh new day? Or did that thought send you back under the covers?

It’s not always an easy thing to make the connection between your thoughts and your actions. Often times, we are just on autopilot. Yet, when you embrace wellness as a life goal, you can begin today to not only look to the future but also see yourself in the moment, fully aware of your surroundings and own being. Here are steps, with natural breathing, to help you have a glimpse into wellness as an integration of your body, mind, and spirit.

1. Set aside one day at home where nothing is planned and you are alone.
2. Turn off all electronic devices and distractions—phones, tv, computer, radio.

Have the air as clear and clean as possible with no evident odors.

3. Start in the living room where you routinely comfortably sit (but not lounging). Be sure your back is supported. Close your eyes. Begin to be aware of your natural breathing pattern for the next several minutes. During those minutes, what thoughts are running through your mind? If only on your breathing, then you are ready for the next step.
4. Open your eyes and stand up as you continue focusing on your breathing. Move to another part of the house. Sit down again and close your eyes. After a few moments, has your breathing changed? Are you still focused on your breathing? If so, stay a few more moments, then move to another part of the house.
5. Sit down again, close your eyes, and refocus on your breathing. Any change in your breathing—slower, more rapid, intermittent, the same?

If your natural breathing is slower, you are more than likely in a calmer, more wholistic state where your body is more relaxed, your mind is at rest, and your spirit is in tune and prevalent. You are beginning to know how wellness begins. Silence and focusing on breathing is an awesome way to gain awareness and appreciation that everything you do, and think, and feel, and believe has an impact on your health and sense of wellbeing.

Practice this exercise several times, particularly when you come home stressed and your mind is racing in all different directions. John W. Travis, MD, states in his classic book, *Wellness Workbook*, "As you go through a day, there are many occasions

during which you block breathing by your posture or level of tension. He believes it is important to experience how a complete breath feels in comparison to what natural breathing is like or stressed/halted breathing. Here is his suggested full breath exercise to try sitting, standing, and lying down. Through the nose:

1. Exhale deeply, contracting the belly.
2. Inhale slowly as you expand the abdomen.
3. Continue inhaling as you expand the chest.
4. Continue inhaling as you feel your collarbones lift.
5. Pause briefly. Don't hold.
6. Exhale in reverse pattern, slowly. Release the shoulders, relax the chest, contract the belly.
7. Repeat.

Travis states that “this exercise requires gentle practice to make inhalation and exhalation smooth and balanced. First, practice breathing so the inhalation and exhalation are of equal duration. Next, allow the exhalation to become a little longer. Breathe in this manner as long as it's comfortable.” As with any exercise, always keep in mind your age, health condition, and check with your healthcare provider before you try any suggested exercise. Travis suggests you use this to remind yourself to check your breathing and to remove factors that may be restricting your natural breathing.

That is one reason why I suggest with the natural breathing exercise offered first, you turn off all electronic devices, remove anything that may initially distract you, and practice in a few different rooms to see what affect each room has on your breathing, if

at all. After practicing these exercises for a while, in a week or month reflect on how you are feeling physically, emotionally, mentally. Are you calmer, able to handle stress more effectively? Do you seem to have more energy? I hope so.

Travis' other wellness definition, "Wellness is the loving acceptance of yourself" cannot be under estimated in its impact. One of the greatest experiences in life is to finally know you actually love yourself. It might seem a little odd at first. Yet, when you have a loving acceptance of yourself, you are much more capable of loving and accepting others as they are. So, keep this in mind as you travel your wellness journey. And for those who missed out, here is a summary of Travis' "What is Wellness."

With his permission, I have added my own final element to emphasize that relationships are at the heart of knowing what wellness is all about and loving one another.

- **Wellness is a choice....** *a decision you make to move toward optimal health.*
- **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 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!**

As Travis points out, *Illness starts with “I”, Wellness starts with “WE”*

Again, Wellness is Relationships—**“CONNECTEDNESS IS THE CURRENCY OF WELLNESS.”**

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