

9 DIMENSIONS OF WELLNESS

Evidence-based tactics for optimizing your health and well-being



THE OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY

Edited by
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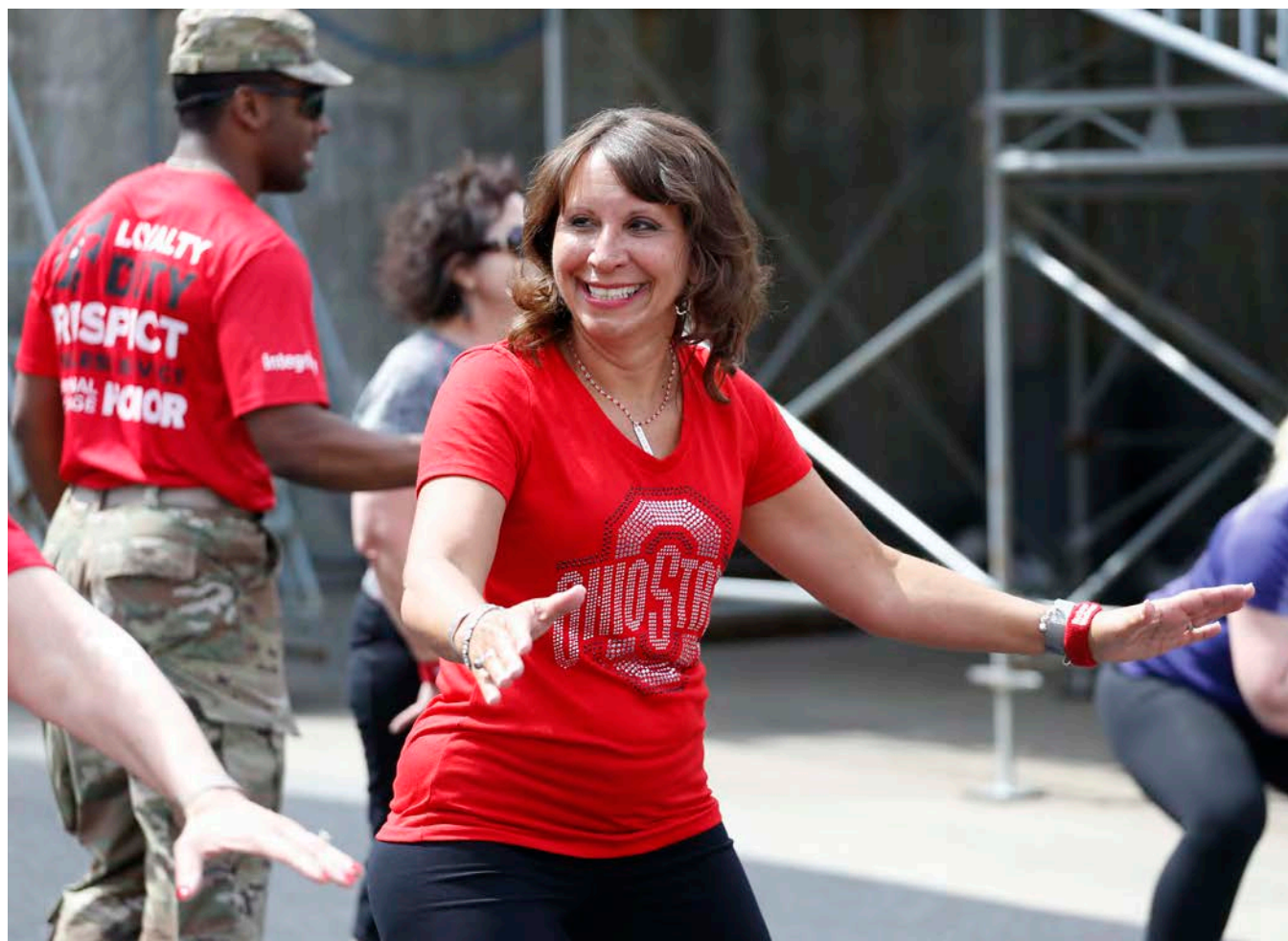
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Nationally, we are facing a health crisis of epidemic proportions: while many of us take great care of others, we generally don't take good care of ourselves. As a result, we are at risk for multiple chronic conditions. One out of two Americans have a chronic disease and one out of four have multiple chronic conditions. Yet, based on population health studies, we know that approximately 80 percent of chronic disease can be prevented with healthy lifestyle behaviors, such as physical activity, healthy eating, not smoking, limiting alcohol intake and practicing regular stress reduction.

However, only an estimated 6.3 percent of the adult population engages in these behaviors. While environment, healthcare and genetics all play a part in determining whether we die prematurely, population health studies support that lifestyle behavioral patterns are the largest predictor of premature death.

The healthcare community is not immune to this crisis as well. In 2017, the National Academy of Medicine launched an action collaborative on clinician well-being and resilience, acknowledging that a high percentage of physicians, nurses and other healthcare professionals suffer from burnout, compassion fatigue, depression and poor work/life balance. Further, in a recent national study of nurses, over half reported suboptimal mental and physical health. Think of that: even the people who deliver healthcare services are suffering from lack of self-care.

Personally and professionally, we must all take better care of ourselves. This practical guide will help you to take better self-care by providing you with evidence-based strategies to achieve optimal health and well-being through a focus on the nine dimensions of wellness. The benefits of good self-care affect the quality of our life now and well into the future. Today can be your January 1: make a resolution to making just one healthy lifestyle change that will lessen your odds of dying prematurely or suffering from chronic disease. If you don't do it for yourself, do it for your loved ones who want you to be healthy and around for many years to come.

Warm and well regards,

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9 dimensions of wellness

Bernadette Mazurek Melnyk, PhD, RN, CRNP, FAANP, FNAP, FAAN
and **Susan Neale, MFA**

Imagine 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 work. 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 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 nine dimensions: physical, emotional, financial, spiritual, social, career, intellectual, creative and environmental. These dimensions build on each other and support each other. Starting today, commit to taking just a little better care of yourself and making one small healthy lifestyle change for the next 30 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 9 dimensions

Wellness is multifaceted and interconnected. Engaging in physical activity, eating healthy, 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.

At The Ohio State University, we use a comprehensive integrative approach to wellness that promotes nine dimensions of well-being for our faculty, staff, and students. We also have a culture of wellness that makes choosing healthy options easy (in other words, making them the social norm).

Each of the articles in this booklet focuses on one of the nine dimensions of wellness. To start, here's an overview.

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 to one drink a day if you're a woman and two drinks a day if you're a man.
- Don't smoke.
- 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.

Four healthy behaviors can help you substantially reduce the risk of many chronic diseases.

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 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.

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 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 and 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. And studies show that intellectual exercise may improve the physical structure of your brain to help prevent cognitive decline.

Career wellness: Engaging in work that provides personal satisfaction and enrichment and is consistent with your values, goals, and lifestyle will keep you professionally healthy. After sleep, we spend most of our time at work, so ask yourself if your work motivates you and lets you use your abilities to their full potential. If it doesn't, you may need to re-evaluate how you spend your working hours. Even if you can't change where you work, you can change your approach to the stressors and challenges you face.

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. And take time to appreciate others' creative efforts.

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

Environmental wellness: If you don't think the environment is part of your wellness, consider this: Evidence shows that air pollution can cause lung cancer, the number one cancer killer in the United States. 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 being open to exploring your own beliefs and respecting others' beliefs.

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, what you'd like to accomplish, and how you'd like to feel a week, six 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 two to five years if you know that 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 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. And you'll help others around you, too. Be well.

Physical wellness

A must for sustained energy

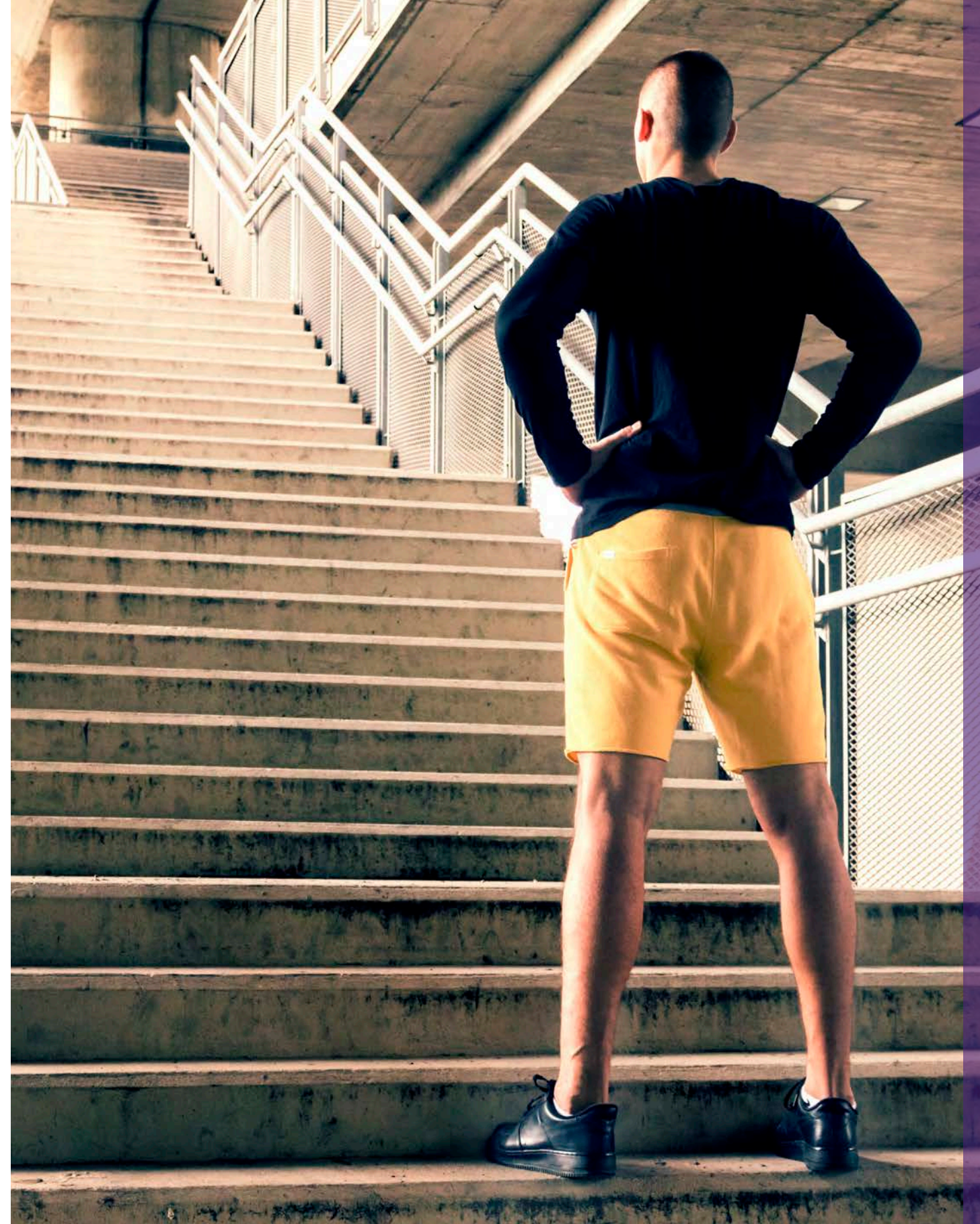
Bernadette Mazurek Melnyk, PhD, RN, CRNP, FAANP, FNAP, FAAN
and **Susan Neale, MFA**

Take steps now to ensure your future good health.

Do 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 effect on how you feel and how you take care of others.

Evidence shows that focusing on self-care now can have lasting positive effects on our long-term health and well-being.



Let's start with your heart

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.

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 between 120 and 129 and diastolic less than 80, stage 1 hypertension as systolic between 130 and 139 or diastolic between 80 and 89, and stage 2 hypertension as systolic at least 140 or diastolic at least 90. The AHA recommends getting your BP checked at every visit or at least once every two years if it's lower than 120/80 mm Hg.

The good news is that 80 percent 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 percent less diabetes, 45 percent less back pain, 93 percent less depression, and 74 percent 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.

Sit less, get active

If getting more physical activity sounds difficult, relax; you don't have to join a gym. 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 work, you'll be doing your body a world of good.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recommend 150 minutes of moderate-intensity aerobic exercise a week for adults 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.

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 7 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 3 or more hours a day, your cardiovascular risk goes up by 30 percent; 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.

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 16.)

Be tobacco-free

Good habits can help you quit unhealthy ones. For instance, moving, eating healthier, and reducing stress can help smokers 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 tobacco.

When trying to quit, remember the 4 Ds:

1. **D**elay until the craving to smoke passes.
2. **D**istract yourself.
3. **D**rink water to beat smoking cravings.
4. **D**eep breathe—it's a quick and effective way to reduce the stress of early smoking cessation.

Limit alcohol intake

Evidence shows that alcohol intake should be limited to one alcoholic beverage a day for women and two for men. Examples of one alcoholic beverage include one beer, one 5-ounce glass of wine, or 1.5 ounces of distilled spirits or liquor (rum, gin, vodka, whiskey).

Boost your nutrition

Small changes can have a big impact. A recent study showed that relatively small weight loss in obese people—just 5 percent of their body weight—lowered diabetes and heart disease risk and improved their metabolic function. Take these actions to boost your nutrition and physical wellness.

- Replace an unhealthy vending machine snack with an apple or some carrot sticks.
- 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 percent “healthy” foods and 20 percent “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, purse, or car.

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 good 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 prove it. Take good care of yourself this year; 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.



Practical tips for achieving emotional wellness

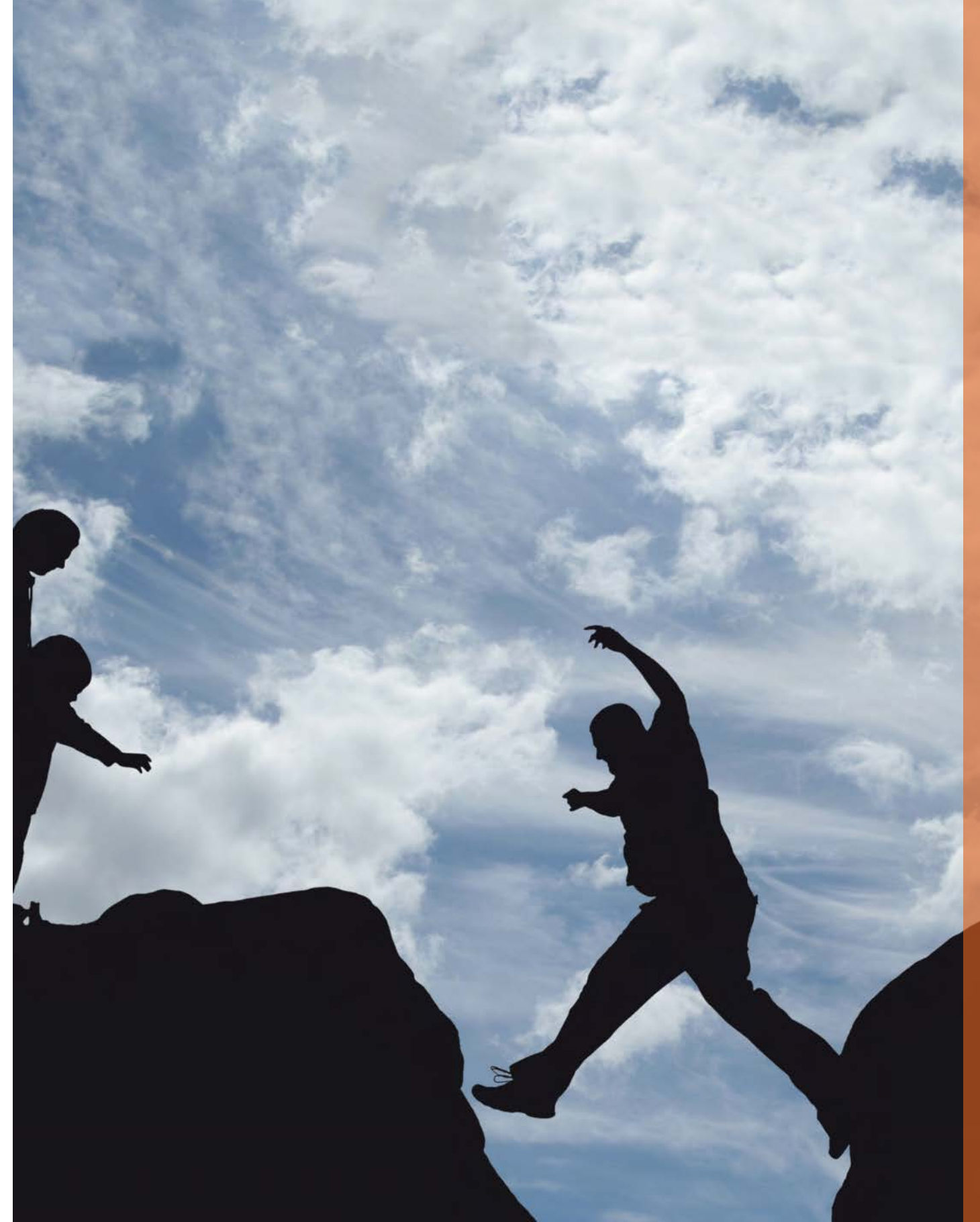
Cope with stress and improve your mood with these research-tested methods

Bernadette Mazurek Melnyk, PhD, RN, CRNP, FAANP, FNAP, FAAN

It's raining, you're running late, you can't find a parking space and you're needed for an important meeting this morning. You can't control the events that trigger anxiety, but you can harness healthy ways to cope with stress and the negative emotions that can arise.

“The suffering from a natural disaster we cannot control, but the suffering from our daily disasters we can.”

– Dalai Lama



When you are emotionally well, you can identify, express and manage your full range of feelings. During times in which 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 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!” which sends your mood in a downward spiral. When you notice negative automatic thoughts, though, you can turn them around and rewrite them.

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. Thank heaven, I’m safe.” Changing the negative thought around to a positive one buffers you from feeling stressed and anxious.

Practice, practice, practice

30 days is the time frame it usually takes to make or break a new habit, including the way we 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 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, or ground yourself in the present with an 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.

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 five days a week.
2. Limit alcohol use to one drink a day for women, two drinks a day for men.
3. Don't smoke.
4. Eat a healthy diet including five fruits and vegetables a day. 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 daily functioning, don't wait. Seek help from a qualified therapist or your healthcare provider.

Here are some more tips for emotional wellness:

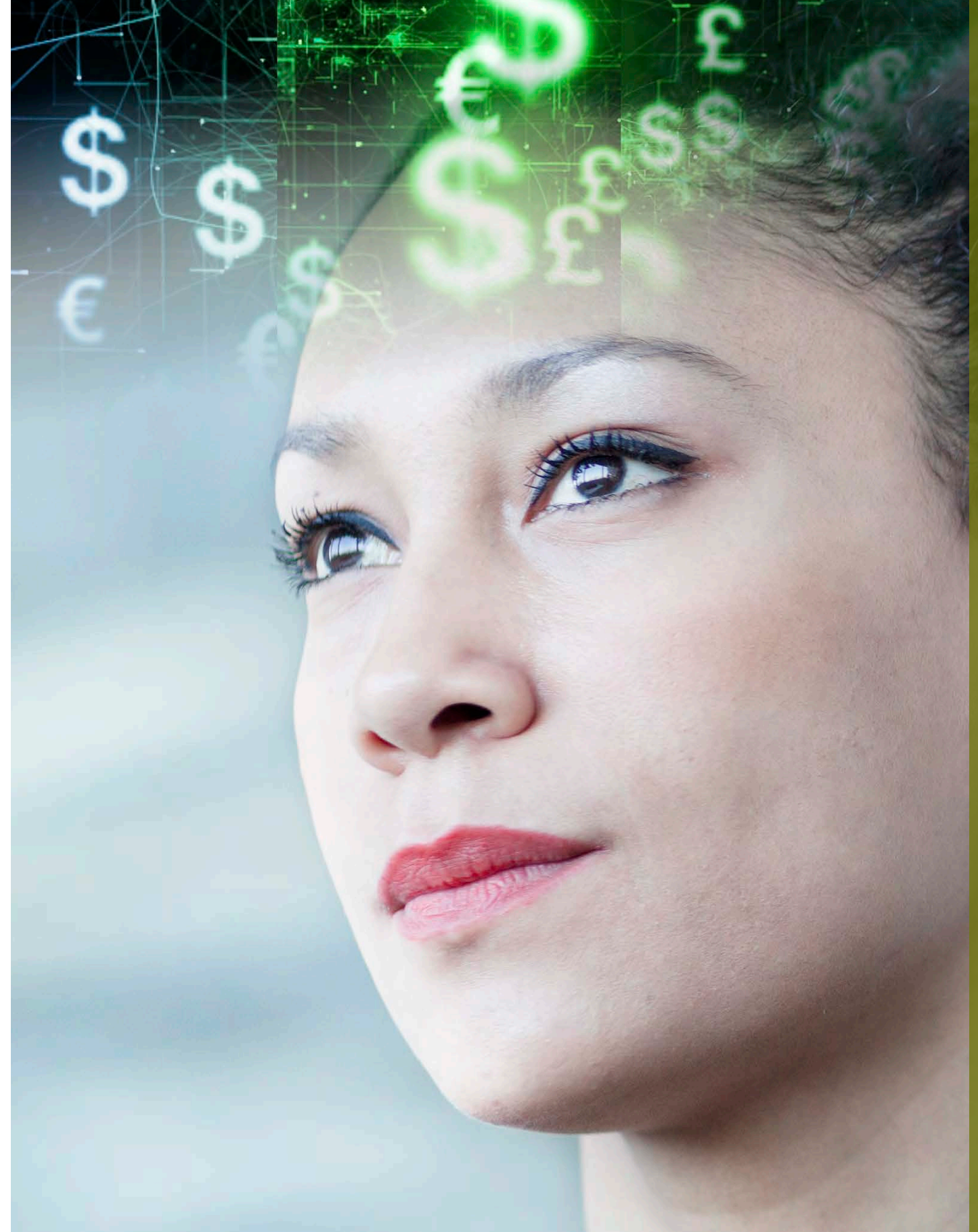
- Break your routine if you are stuck in a rut.
- Manage your energy: build in frequent recovery breaks throughout the day. Sit less, stand more.
- Practice guided imagery to relax and create a positive mood.
- Balance work and personal life: Take time to do things you enjoy.
- Read a positive book five 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).
- Socialize with family and friends.
- Have an attitude of gratitude – write your blessings down.
- Laugh more often.
- 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.
- Make a plan for how to deal with your main stressors.
- 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.
- Enjoy nature and the outdoors.
- Help others. Compassion for others helps us feel good, too!

Getting financially fit

Bernadette Mazurek Melnyk, PhD, RN, CRNP, FAANP, FNAP, FAAN

If you're feeling stressed about your financial situation, you're not alone. 72 percent of Americans surveyed in a recent American Psychological Association (APA) study said they experience financial stress: worrying about bills, emergencies, taking care of aging parents, children's college tuition and their financial future in retirement. This widespread financial stress has prompted many businesses and organizations to offer financial wellness training to their members and employees. The Ohio State University was one of the first universities to include financial wellness in its wellness initiatives for students, faculty and staff.

72 percent of Americans surveyed said they experience financial stress, worrying about bills, emergencies, aging parents, college tuition and 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 at work and complicating personal relationships. Clearly, your mind and body can't afford financial stress. However, there is great news: 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 finances: Make a series of financial dates with yourself (and your spouse/partner) to make a plan for how and on what you will spend your finances. Once you've got a plan in place, schedule monthly checkups to stay on track.

Planning: Analyze money in, money out. To manage your cash flow, identify how much money you have coming in from all sources each month. Then, identify your fixed expenses that don't change from month to month, such as car payments, mortgage, student loans and utility bills; and your variable expenses, such as money spent on food, clothing, vacations, emergencies and health. Variable expenses may present opportunities to cut back or save, and fixed expenses can sometimes be renegotiated. Three months' worth of credit card and bank statements should give you a clear picture.

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. Online resources like quicken.com, youneedabudget.com and moneydance.com can help. See *The New York Times* "Your Money" columnist Ron Lieber's "31 Steps to a Financial Tuneup," for a complete checklist of money-savvy actions to take, like reviewing your student loans.

The importance of interest: The math is simple: money you invest earns you more money; money you borrow costs you money, so make debt reduction a priority. 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 five percent interest and, in 40 years, you'll have \$79,772!

Protect yourself from big loss: Reduce worry about financial emergencies by saving a "cushion" of at least six months' pay.

Savings hacks: Lieber suggests checking with your wireless and phone carriers for better deals, setting up an automatic payment on your credit cards to avoid late fees and spending gift cards as soon as you get them.

Find help: A certified financial planner (CFP) can help you evaluate your current situation and show you ways to pay off debt and invest in your future. Fee-based CFPs charge a one-time fee rather than taking a percentage of your investments' earnings, and you're likely to find the fee small compared to the benefits you'll reap from good financial planning. Find one at napfa.org.

Find some healthy outlets for your stress that do not cost money: Getting 30 minutes of physical activity five days a week and taking care of yourself can reduce your overall stress, which will help you to think more clearly and get a better handle on your finances.

Focus on the positive things in your life: Counting just a couple of things that you are thankful for every day gives you a sense of optimism and can help to reduce your stress.

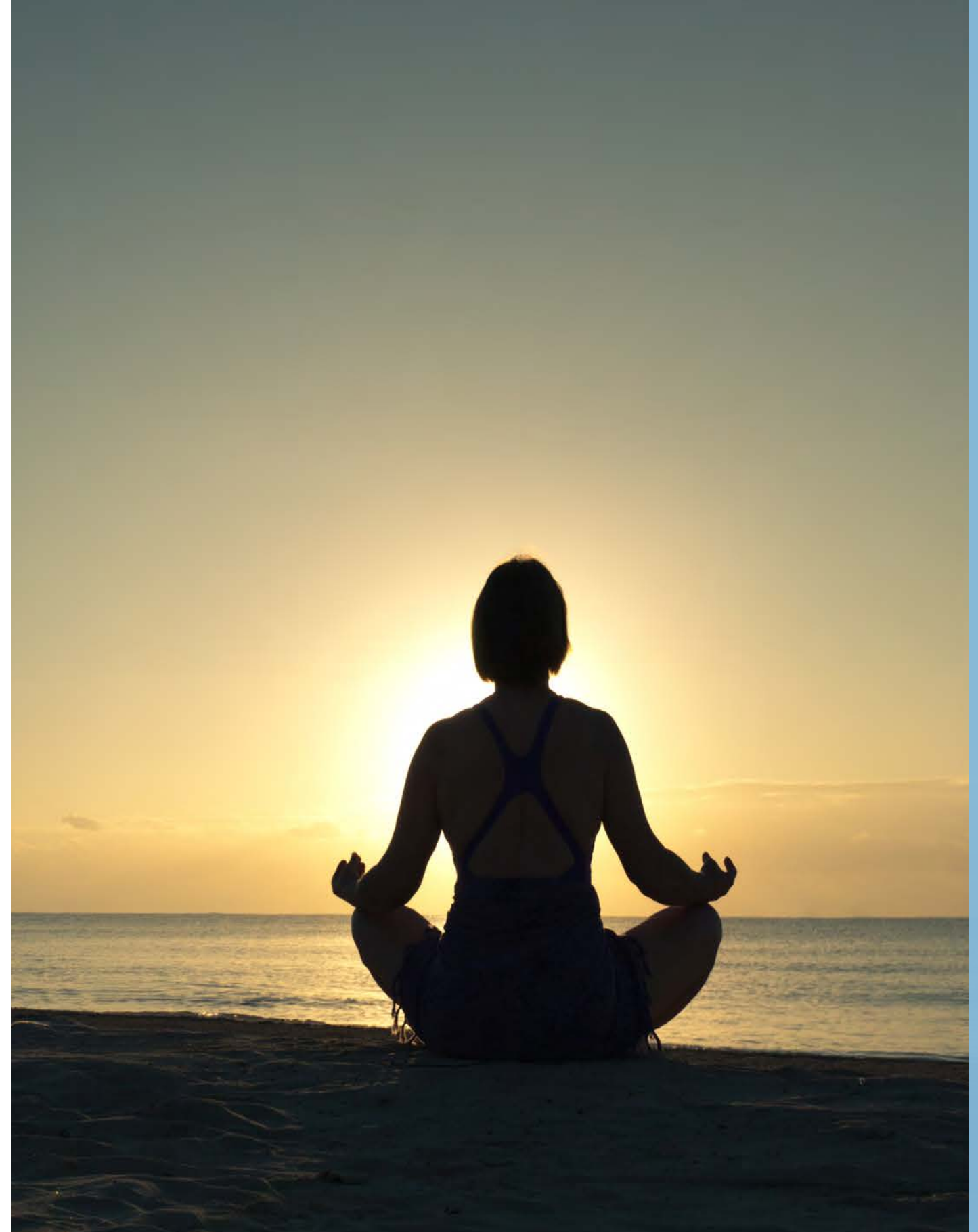
Even if you can't pay off that student loan overnight, you can relieve the stress by gaining control of the situation. Feeling in charge of your finances will boost your confidence, help you focus, give you peace of mind, and alleviate a lot of stress and anxiety. And that's a good feeling!

Spiritual wellness

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Have 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.

To be spiritually well is to be willing to seek answers and see things in new ways.



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.

Spirituality and work

Think about your job and what you do on a daily basis. When do you feel most energized? 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 to be in relationship with others.

Disconnected much?

Too often, the pressures of modern life may interfere with what is most important to us. Crushing workloads, family responsibilities, financial

pressures, and fast-paced living create the perfect storm that makes it difficult to act on our values. And sometimes, we haven't identified what we value because we aren't sure what our purpose is.

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.

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. We've listed some ideas below to consider as you continue your journey.

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: Cultivating an “attitude of gratitude” is cited by many spiritual leaders from multiple faith traditions as essential to their daily practice. In their work with newly diagnosed HIV+ patients, JT 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.

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

Bernadette Mazurek Melnyk, PhD, RN, CRNP, FAANP, FNAP, FAAN

Social 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.

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

– 19th Surgeon General Vivek Murthy



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 former 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 just 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 all of us 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, (’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 of the University of Delaware, who completed an Ohio State post-doctoral fellowship in 2014. 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. On the following page 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 people in your family and work environment.

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 like, “you don’t listen.” Consider taking a class in communication skills if you believe yours need some help to improve.

Connect with your community. Volunteering can give you a sense of self-worth and connect you to other people. Or, consider joining a local group focused on an activity you enjoy, like singing or knitting, 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 find out areas where you could improve. You can find a free interpersonal skills test at [Skillsyouneed.com](https://www.skillsyouneed.com).

Celebrate and compliment 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 complimenting and thanking people when it is deserved. The book “How to Win Friends and Influence People” by Dale Carnegie has some great suggestions.

Smile and learn people’s names. There is great value in smiling and remembering people by their first names.

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.

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. If you’re married or in a committed relationship, show your partner loving respect.

Learn to argue in a positive, constructive way. Psychologist John Gottman PhD, who heads the Relationship Research Institute, points out that most couples argue from time to time, as do friends and co-workers, 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!

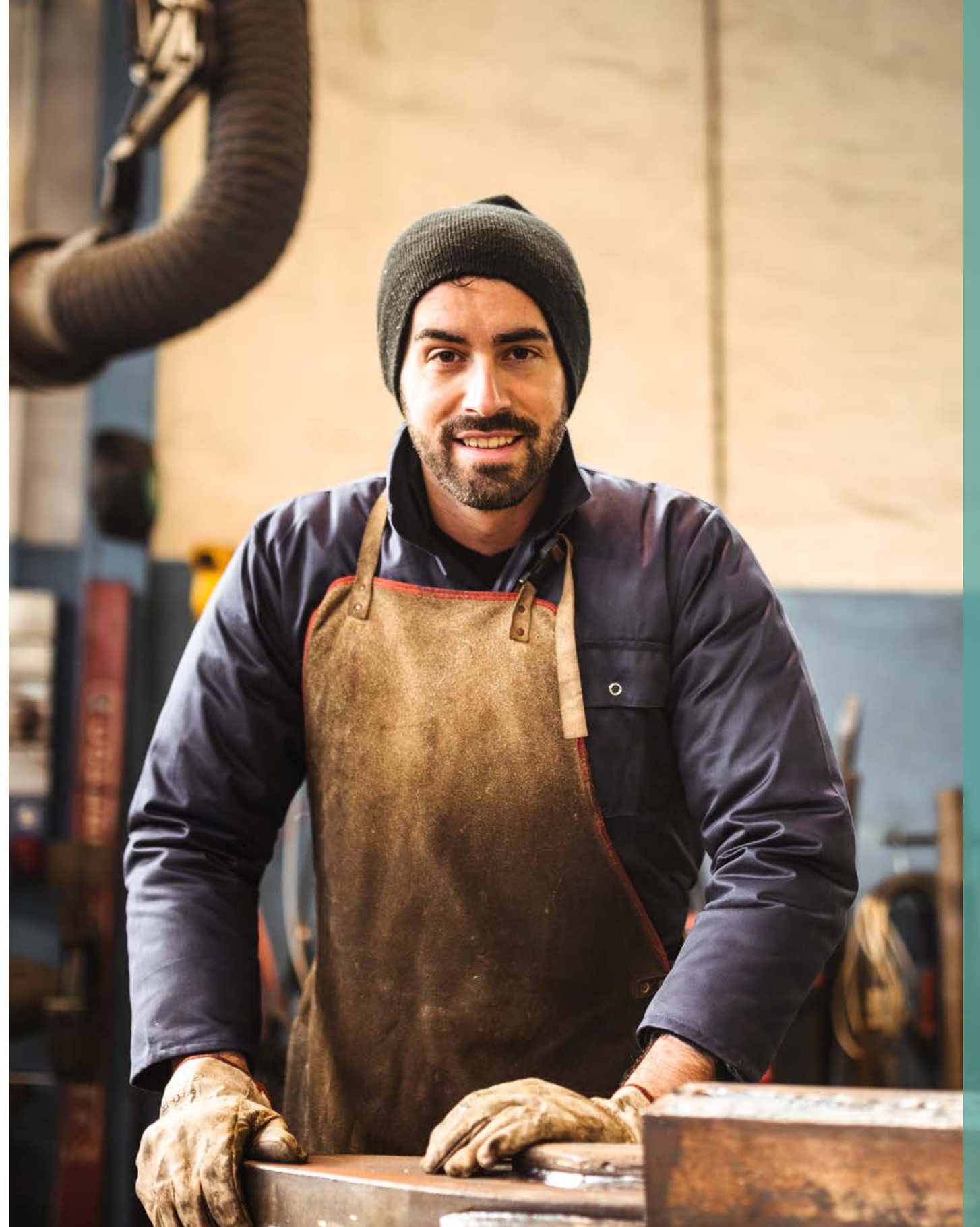
Career wellness

Brenda C. Buffington, EdD, NBC-HWC, EP-C, **Bernadette Mazurek Melnyk**, PhD, RN, CRNP, FAANP, FNAP, FAAN, and **Susan Neale**, MFA

Imagine a life in which you have the perfect job: you're doing what you were cut out to do, learning new things all the time, and facing exciting challenges while your colleagues treat you with respect. You start each day looking forward to work and come home excited about what you've done. Is this far from your reality? If burnout, stress, and dissatisfaction are common themes for you and your colleagues, it may be time to re-evaluate your career wellness.

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 if your work motivates you and lets you use your abilities to your full potential. Also, are you aligned with your dreams and areas of passion? If you are not, you may need to re-evaluate how you spend your working hours. Bern Melnyk always asks the question, "In the next five years, what will you do if you know that you cannot fail?" If you are aligned with your dream in your work, you will notice that your energy level is good and sustains itself throughout the day. If not, it will be challenging for you to go to work every day and stay motivated while you are there.

If you are aligned with your dream in your work, you will notice that your energy level is good and sustains itself throughout the day.



On the job strategies to “direct your sails”

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 ten slow and deep breaths.
- There’s an app for that! Many free apps, like Headspace and Calm, can help you quickly ease into mindfulness.

A personal story—Brenda Buffington

“Ships are safe in the harbor, but that’s not what ships are built for.”
—John A. Shedd

In 2013, I set out on what I now refer to as my “wilderness adventure.” I left city life and the Midwestern plains of Columbus, Ohio, and moved across the country to the United States Air Force Academy (USAFA) in beautiful Colorado Springs, CO. My new home, on the USAFA base nestled at the foot of the Rocky Mountain range, was in entirely new country to me. The job was amazing, and I quickly made new friends, but my work/life balance was out of alignment.

Then came the call: my “snowbird” father’s health was failing, and he was relocating permanently back to Ohio from sunny Arizona. I wanted to be back there to help him—my only sibling was in Pennsylvania—and I missed my sons, who were still in Ohio. A series of new developments and a research collaboration at The Ohio State University College of Nursing led to an opportunity to return to Columbus.

I risked a lot—new friends, a great job in a beautiful location—by making the move back, but I now walk to work, never worry about parking, and my work/life balance is aligned. I needed to go there to get back here. A favorite quote has carried me through: “We can’t direct the winds, but we can adjust the sails.” —Thomas S. Monson

Self-care and self-healing in the workplace: Many tools of self-care and self-healing are low cost and can significantly and positively affect the work environment. All of us can promote self-care, not only leaders, and by doing so, we can affect overall costs by reducing sick leave and absenteeism, creating an environment where people can thrive.

- **Introduce self-care in staff meetings.** At the Ohio State Medical Center, we do “Band in Your Hand” workouts using stretch bands, chair aerobics, guided mindfulness moments and numerous Lunch & Learn programs to build resiliency and reduce stress. You can employ these tools at work, too.
- **Post beautiful pictures.** Research shows that visual triggers can help to motivate behavior change and reduce stress. Let everyone have a chance to decide which picture will be displayed and change it often.
- **Reward self-care and self-healing behavior.** Openly recognize these positive behaviors, such as thanking the employee or coworker who stayed home to get well rather than coming to work.
- **Create a “respite room.”** Any small space can be turned into an area that is dedicated to peace and quiet for recovery; a comfortable chair, low lighting and maybe even a punching bag to release tension. If you’re not in a position to change your workspace, make your car an area of calm you can escape to on a break.

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 my 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. Try becoming more aware of when you are distracted and picture that STOP sign. Then, give your all to one task.

It takes 30 days to make or break a new habit.



Purpose, pleasure and pride: Author and 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. If we can design our workplace to increase our purpose, pleasure and pride, we can stack the deck in favor of a fulfilling work life. Here are some ideas for increasing your pride in your work, your sense of purpose there, and your pleasure in doing your job:

- **Make a best friend at work.** One of the most powerful contributors to work satisfaction and productivity is agreement with the statement, “I have a best friend at work.” Some studies suggest this may be because friends work better together than acquaintances, whether that be through collaborative decision-making or menial labor. It also can make work just plain more engaging and fun.
- **Seek a job that fits you.** As *Flow* author Mihaly Csikszentmihaly advises, “finding a job that engages your natural talents and gives you constant feedback is a sure way to build happiness.”
- **Consider your work hours.** Commuting is the least favorite activity people do on a daily basis. Research shows that people who commute an hour each way would need an additional 40 percent of their monthly wage to be as satisfied with their life as people who walk to the office. If a long commute is affecting your pleasure in working, try to intentionally use that time for enjoyment by listening to music or positive audiobooks.
- **Set goals:** Setting goals gives us something to look forward to and a framework for accomplishing it.

Take action and set a SMART goal

(See the first article in this booklet for more about SMART goals.) A good SMART career wellness goal is specific and achievable, such as: “For the next thirty days, I will take one minute before and after my shift every day to just breathe, get my thinking right and to become more mindful of the present moment.” (It takes 30 days to make or break a new habit.)

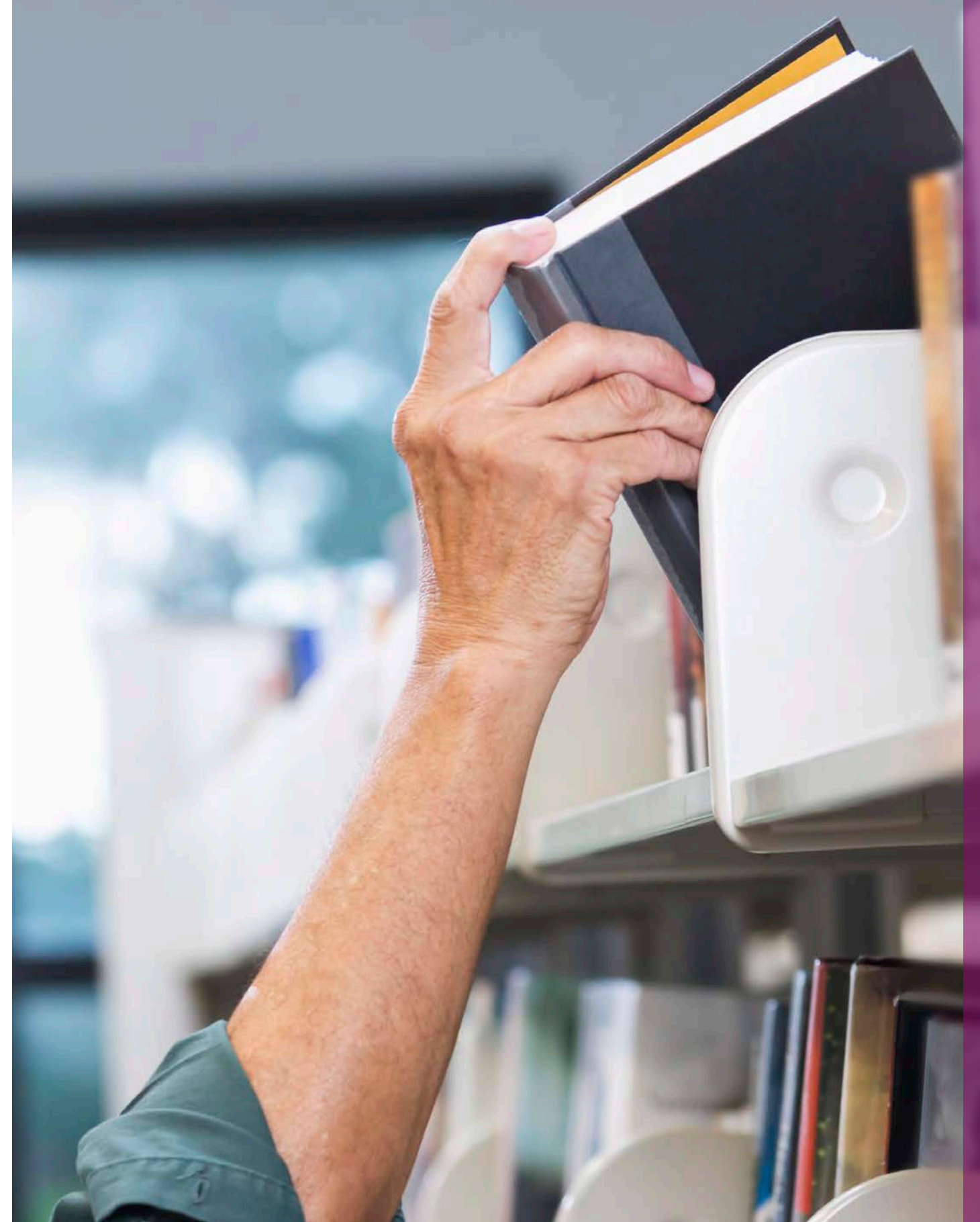
Are you where you need to be? Then bloom where you are planted, and try some of the “on the job strategies” to keep your career wellness healthy.

The importance of intellectual well-being and brain health—continue to exercise your mind!

Bernadette Mazurek Melnyk, PhD, RN, CRNP, FAANP, FNAP, FAAN

If you visit The Ohio State University’s fencing gym, you’ll see young athletes trying to stand on wobble boards—platforms with rounded bases like half of an exercise ball. The more they wiggle and 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.

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.



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 scientists once believed that humans were born with all of the brain cells they would ever have, we now know that new neurons are being born continuously throughout life. In some areas of the brain, neurogenesis regularly replaces old, dead cells. 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!



There are so many ways you can improve your intellectual wellness, and many of them are free—and fun. Here are a few strategies:

Read: 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. Even reading for fun can exercise your ability to visualize and make new neural connections.

Learn: Visit your local library, university, museum or civic organization for public lectures about subjects new to you. Try learning a foreign language, a musical instrument, or a new craft or skill.

Play: Sudoku, crossword puzzles, and strategic games like chess and Scrabble® exercise your mind and memory. Trying a new sport that you wouldn’t usually go out for can provide mental as well as physical challenges.

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. Try a new adventure! Stay curious. Even taking a different route to work or the grocery store can stimulate your mind.

Practice mindfulness: To practice mindfulness, focus your awareness on the present moment. A good 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. A good book about mindfulness is “The Present” by Spencer Johnson, MD; it’s an easy read.

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!

Creative wellness

Laura Newpoff, Bernadette Mazurek Melnyk, PhD, RN, CRNP, FAANP, FNAP, FAAN
and Susan Neale, MFA

Expressing your emotions 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 the 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.

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.



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. 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. But 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 and, 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, buy an instructional video and give it a whirl at home. Mix dancing in with your workout routine to fight off monotony or join a class with other beginners to form connections.

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. Instead of pouring a glass of wine or turning on the TV to wind down after a stressful day at work, pull out a blank-canvas journal and chronicle your day with doodles. 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, in general, 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. If you've never done it before, try a small role or non-speaking part, or volunteer at your community theater and ask what you can do to help put on a play. Don't have time for a major production? Take out a book of plays from the library and get some friends together to take parts and read through one aloud.

Conceive of a photography project. Photography used to be an expensive hobby, but now most smartphones come equipped with high-quality cameras. Embark on a photo project – pick a theme like covered bridges or old barns if you're on the road a lot, for example. The exercise will allow you to practice mindfulness – you'll pay more attention to every bridge and barn you see – and have an artistic product to show off at the end.

Take in the ballet, visit the art museum. We get so busy in our daily routines that it often goes unnoticed when a world-class art exhibit arrives at the local museum or a rare dance performance comes to town. Make it a point to enjoy arts and cultural venues as a way to relax, broaden your horizons and get out of a rut. Buy some tickets far in advance so you'll have something to look forward to, and you can learn more about the performance ahead of time, increasing your artistic awareness.

Have fun cooking. Join a cooking class or buy a cookbook focused on foods you're not used to preparing and get busy getting creative in the kitchen. Or, instead of a book club, start a cooking club with your friends and come up with a rotating menu of dishes from different ethnic cuisines to experiment with at each other's homes. Not only does it foster fun and social interaction, it allows you to experience something completely new and have something to look forward to.

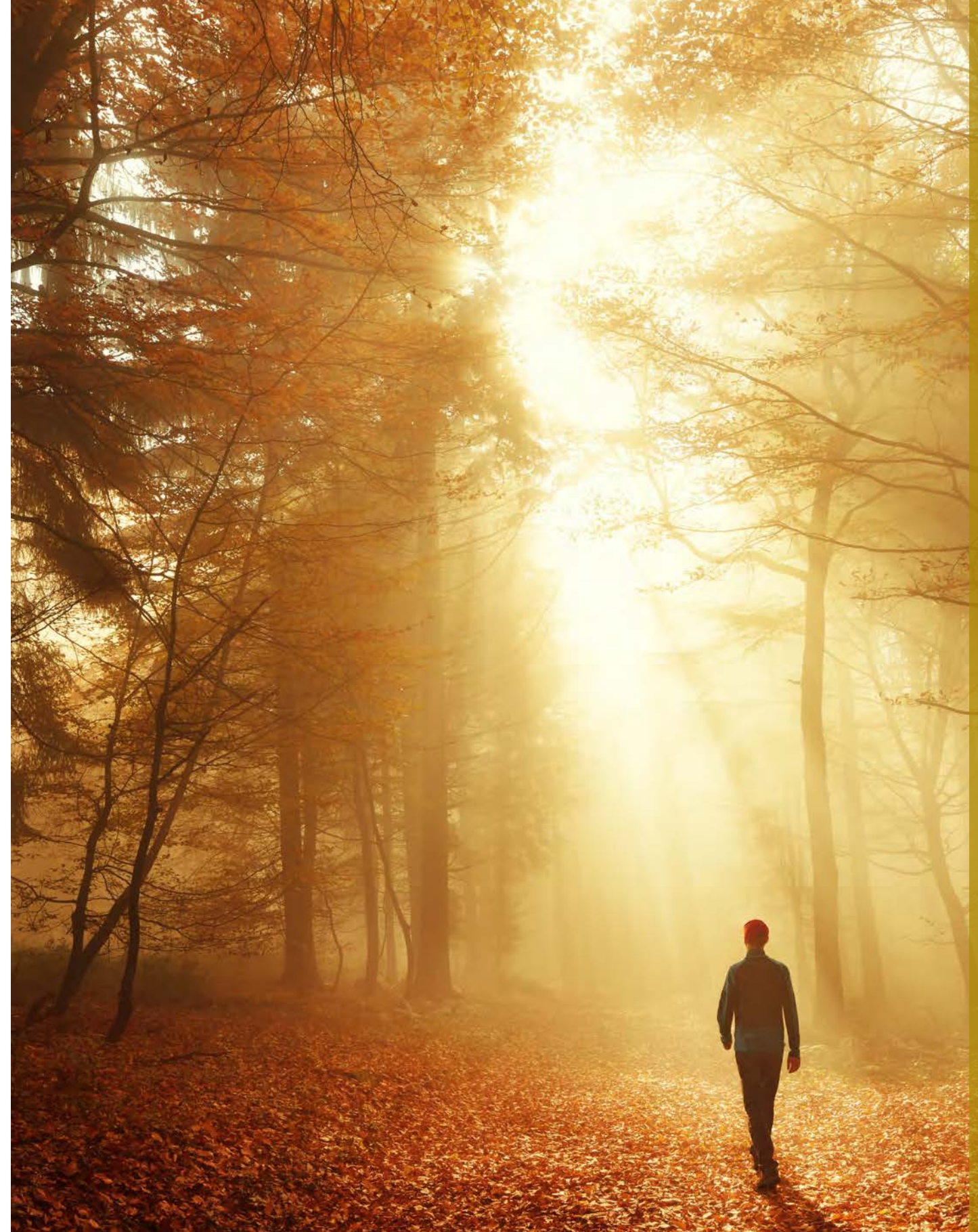
There are plenty of other creative efforts you can pursue as part of your wellness strategy. You can get creative while gardening, writing a presentation or toast, helping a friend redecorate her home; the possibilities are endless. The world's greatest artists had no formal roadmap for their paintings,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

Environmental wellness

Megan Amaya, PhD, CHES, Bernadette Mazurek Melnyk, PhD, RN, CRNP, FAANP, FNP, FAAN, and Susan Neale, MFA

You don't have to go far to experience nature. It can be in your own backyard, 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. And 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 even 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 home we live in, the car we drive, the office we work in, 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 percent of people found a reduction in depression after going for a walk outdoors versus a 45 percent reduction by those who went on an indoor 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 work, home, school, with your family or through volunteering in the community and creating a culture of respect and gratitude. In addition, since environmental wellness encompasses 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.

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.

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, natural 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 a city sponsored pick-up route or a drop-off location. Learn more about what you can recycle from your local solid waste authority.

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