

What is Wellness? **By Dr. Stephen Godin**

There is no doubt about it; health and health promotion have become hot topics in the past several years. Our minds have become flooded with a variety of ideas, and we are left to pick and choose what makes sense to us. In order to simplify this task, I would like to introduce to you the concept of “wellness.”

In order to define wellness, we must first review the most common perception of health. For years people have considered health to be “the absence of disease.” With this attitude people visit their doctor only when their “health” becomes compromised (i.e. by a virus or injury). We now know that there is much more to health. Being free of disease is part of it, but it also extends to achieving optimal physical and mental well-being, such that we can live life to its’ full potential. “Wellness” may then be defined as “the interaction of the body, mind, and spirit- the appreciation that everything we do, think, feel, and believe has an impact on our state of health.” The theory is that by adopting proactive and preventative attitudes toward health we can avoid many chronic illnesses and improve our overall quality of life.

Health Canada has recently adopted this concept of wellness to a campaign called “Vitality: A Positive Approach to Healthy Living”. The program has three major focuses - which are also the key elements of wellness.

The first focus is on *healthy eating*. We should be less concerned with negative thinking such as “restrictive eating” and “counting calories.” Rather, our focus should shift to enjoying the foods we like in moderation and controlling our diet by listening to hunger cues. By gradually making “life choices” in what we eat we will have the most permanent effect on our health.

Paramount to wellness and vitality is *active living*. We should be less concerned with regimented and vigorous exercise programs, and concepts like “no pain, no gain.” Instead, we should value enjoyable activities and make them part of our daily routine. Studies have shown that moderate, everyday activities such as walking, dancing and yard work are important for health and longevity in the general population. In fact, sustained moderate energy expenditure is more effective than bouts of high-intensity exercise in managing body weight.

Finally, in order to be healthy we must *feel good about ourselves*. This leads to a positive attitude toward life in general. When we make healthy lifestyle choices they tend to elevate our self-esteem. We feel empowered by taking control of our health. We also need to be accepting of our physical appearance. Realize that the media portrayal of a healthy figure is often very different from what is actually considered healthy by medical standards. In addition, forming close relationships with friends and family, and maintaining a strong social network assist us to enjoy daily life.

You can do your part to promote wellness and vitality to your family and friends. Create environments in your home, school, and community that support healthy living and encourage people to eat healthy, be active, and feel good about themselves for life.

If you have any questions about this article, or would like more information please contact Dr. Godin at Cole Harbour Chiropractic at 435-WELL.