



Wellness

It seems that everywhere you look there are adverts for new diets, fitness programmes, relaxation classes, and things to make us happier, fitter and healthier.

At the same time, many people have health issues related to lifestyle choices, are in relationships that have gone wrong, or have mental health problems.

In fact, a recent labour force survey showed that the number of cases of work-related stress, depression or anxiety accounted for 44% of work-related ill health in Britain ... a staggering 595,000 cases a year, and similar figures are reported elsewhere.

The idea of improving health and well-being in order to live a better life has been around for a long time. So let's start with a quick look at some of these ideas and how they've brought us to an understanding of what wellness means today.

Many ancient cultures saw health as being a balance of a healthy mind, body and spirit, and there were practitioners who helped people in these areas. What we would today call psychiatrists, medical doctors and spiritual teachers.

More recently in 1948 the World Health Organisation published the principles which it considered to be basic to the happiness, harmonious relations and security of everyone.

And one of them was that: "Health is a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and **not merely the absence of disease or infirmity**". So making it explicit that from their perspective, health was more than just not being ill.

In the 1960s the National Wellness Institute in America went further when it defined wellness as: "... an active process through which people become aware of, and make choices toward, a more successful existence."

They suggest that there are six main dimensions, or areas, of wellness and that by working on and developing all six dimensions in our lives, we can build a holistic sense of wellness and fulfilment.

There are other programmes which speak of anything from five to ten different dimensions, but the main ideas are contained within these six, so let's have a look at each of them in more detail.



Occupational wellness is about getting personal satisfaction through work – making a contribution to something which is rewarding and meaningful, and also feeling that there is a sense of progression – or being involved in making something better.

When it's missing, people often feel that their career is unrewarding and they become less active, uninvolved, and in some cases bitter and resentful.

Physical wellness is more than just taking part in regular physical activity and eating a balanced nutritious diet, it also includes things like making sure we get enough sleep, taking responsibility for minor illnesses, and seeking professional medical help when it's needed.

A poor state of physical wellness could show itself as someone being out of shape, consuming things which, in excess can do harm, and ignoring the early warning signs of more serious medical conditions.

Social wellness is about living in harmony with others and with the physical environment by enhancing personal relationships and contributing to making a better living space. So healthy relationships in a healthy environment.

Being self-centred and living in conflict with others can be signs of a lack of social wellness.

Intellectual wellness involves being curious, challenging and expanding the mind by engaging in stimulating mental activities like problem solving, creative activities and learning.

Without it, people can become self-satisfied, or worry about new challenges instead of taking them on.

Spirituality is often seen as a journey. For some, it's a religious route and for others it's a secular path, but both are about exploring values and beliefs.

When this is missing, people can find themselves living in a way which is inconsistent with what they truly believe and value.

Emotional wellness involves being aware of your feelings and emotions and being able to express and manage them.

People who deny or suppress their feelings, rather than controlling them, can sometimes lash out, blame others or hold grudges.



These six dimensions don't work in isolation, they interact together to create our overall wellness.

Of course, no wellness programme can stop bad things from happening, but resilience is often linked to wellness and can mean that a person is better able to cope with difficult times.

Products and services to support wellness are nothing new. However, not all of them have lived up to their claims.

Today wellness is a massive global industry, and there are some who say it's become too commercialised.

One thing is clear from the amount of money being spent on things like healthy eating and nutrition, wellness tourism, fitness, and workplace wellness, is it that there's a huge demand for products and services in these areas.

And while wellness is something that can certainly be helped and supported, it's not something that can be bought or treated.

It's a personal undertaking to learn, grow and make choices towards a more successful existence.