

# How Your Emotions Affect Your Health

## Proven Ways to Stay Well



**T**he flood of news about health and fitness these days can be more confusing than helpful. If you've been exercising or eating "right" for years but still feel frustrated and unfulfilled, you are not alone.

There are ways to take charge of your health by tapping your inner resources in effective ways. The kinds of changes that we support are simple and are designed to increase self-awareness, since all aspects of life are interdependent.

**Example:** When you're worried about something, you're also likely to have an upset stomach.

What may appear to be individual events are really interconnected aspects of a larger, more complex system.

When you master small changes, you build a fortified base from which to take further steps on your healing journey toward wellness.

Although many people associate wellness only with fitness, nutrition or stress reduction, wellness is really much more. Wellness brings people into a domain of self-responsibility and self-empowerment.

### SET GOALS FOR WELLNESS

Goals keep you on course. And more than that, goals are like magnets—they tend to attract people and resources that help get them accomplished. It's almost magical how this happens.

Often people set their sights too high and then quit completely when they don't make the grade. Approach these "impossible" goals by breaking them down into manageable parts.

### BREATHING REDUCES STRESS

Stress is inevitable—you need it to warn you about the negative forces of

life. But there are many forms of stress that wear you down and cause a variety of health problems.

You may not be aware of it, but every tense situation—or even memories of tense situations—causes a change in breathing. The more stressed you feel, the more shallow your breathing becomes. Consciously breathing deeply can relieve tension, quiet fear and relieve pain. So before you reach for aspirin or antacid tablets, do some breathing.

### EMOTIONS AND HEALTH

There is a heavy price to be paid when feelings are denied or repressed. Lethargy, boredom and a lack of enthusiasm toward life may be the consequences. Those who are unaccustomed to dealing with feelings in healthy ways often seek out other means to cover up those feelings or distract themselves, such as alcohol, food, drugs, TV, unhealthy relationships or compulsive work.

Befriend your emotional self. Accept emotions as valuable signals that tell you something is in need of attention. *How to acknowledge emotions...*

- Write an angry letter and then tear it up.
- Compose a poem about your grief.
- Draw, paint or even dance to express your feelings.
- Exercise vigorously.
- Talk about your feelings.
- Let fear be there.
- Let discouragement be there.

Don't try to chase these emotions away. Look at them. Express them

*Bottom Line/Personal* interviewed John Travis, MD, and Regina Sara Ryan, coauthors of *Wellness: Small Changes You Can Use to Make a Big Difference* (Ten Speed Press, \$7.95).

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when it is appropriate to do so. Then move on.

### SIMPLIFY YOUR LIFE

Becoming well in body, mind and spirit is not nearly as difficult as it may seem. Wellness is not a matter of accumulating something, like more research or experience.

Rather, wellness is realized by unburdening yourself of all those things that prevent the natural state of healthiness from being present. To become well is to appreciate simplicity. *Examples:*

- Simplify your life.
- Simplify your diet.
- Take time to rest your mind.
- See your loved ones as brand-new every day.
- One breath is precious...one smile...one day of seeing the sun.

### HONOR YOUR BODY'S WISDOM

Inhabit your body. Learn to start listening to what it is saying to you and to trust what you hear.

Listening to others instead of yourself...or saying *yes* when you mean *no* are just two examples of the many ways you shortchange yourself. Wellness is about "coming home"—taking up residence inside your own body once again.

### REPROGRAM YOURSELF

Current research in the field of psychoneuroimmunology verifies what folk healers have known for centuries—that thinking and emotions have a direct impact on the strength of the immune system.

The immune system is the first line of defense against disease. Strengthening your immune system consciously, through the use of imagery or nurturing self-talk, gives you a much better chance of maintaining whole-body health.

### CONNECT TO THE EARTH FOR HEALING

When was the last time you sat on the ground or touched the earth in some way? This may seem silly, but physical contact with soil, natural waters, sunlight and fresh air is healing.

When stress has built up, a walk around the block is often all that is needed to restore perspective.

Beyond that, you connect with forces stronger than the individual

self in nature, and this puts everything in perspective.

### A PARTNERSHIP IN HEALING

There will be times in your life when you need the care and attention of a helping professional—a doctor, psychologist, social worker, etc.\*

When you're looking for such professionals, it's important to find people willing to take the time to answer questions and listen to your concerns. If you find someone who is unwilling to do this, switch to someone who will.

### BOTTOM LINE

Getting started on these small changes will help you make a difference in your life. We hope that you will experience increased self-awareness and self-appreciation...have a sense of greater inner strength...and, above all, live a healthier life. ■

\*Helping professionals interested in learning more about developing partnership relationships with their patients or clients can contact Wellness Associates, 707-937-2331. A book, *Wellness for Helping Professionals: Creating Compassionate Cultures*, is available from Wellness Associates for \$29.95.

