

Emotional Wellness

This month, we look at emotional wellness—the ability and skills to express feelings, enjoy life, adjust to emotional challenges, cope with stress, and recover from traumatic life experiences. This dimension affects, and is affected by, all of the other dimensions. We will highlight some tools people find practical and useful including yoga, journaling, and mindfulness.



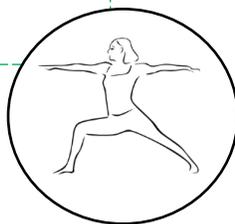
Yoga as a Wellness Tool¹

Yoga may help improve² symptoms of depression, anxiety, and PTSD, and boost emotional well-being and mood. In addition to relieving stress, yoga can help build resilience to stress—the ability to bounce back when experiencing a difficult challenge. The complete history of Yoga is uncertain, but the earliest records discovered were etched into ancient stone 5000 years ago³ on the Indian sub-continent. Yoga may be the oldest practice of self-development, teaching how to connect your mind, body, and spirit to help you live a more focused life. The word Yoga comes from the ancient word *yuj*, which mean to unite or connect.³

Learn more about science and yoga from this 16-minute video from the National Institutes of Health (National Center on Complementary and Integrative Health):

<https://nccih.nih.gov/video/yoga>

There are many forms of Yoga, both ancient and modern. Hatha Yoga, introduced in the 15th century by Yogi Swatmarama,⁴ is now very popular.



Yoga uses a series of poses, or body positions, often practiced in a specific order to create a flow.

Different types of poses are used to increase flexibility, strength, and balance. Over time, these poses help strengthen the body. Slow, deep breathing is coordinated with the poses. Breath control is calming physically. Breath control also focuses awareness on the body while quieting stressful thoughts. Meditation, which goes along with the Yoga poses, is a time to relax, quiet your mind, and for many enhances emotional wellness. Being more centered can help you cope with hassles and problems that arise in your day to day life. Many find Yoga helps them experience a better sleep quality.

Yoga connects and centers your mind, and body. There are truly many physical and emotional benefits. It is not a cure for stress or emotional imbalance but can be a useful tool. You can talk to your doctor on your next visit about adding Yoga to your self-care routine.



Special Dates in May 2018

May 1 is *World Asthma Day*. To learn more and download the logo, see <http://ginasthma.org/wad/>

May 6 is *International No Diet Day*. While there is no official sponsor for this day, you can see ideas and download the “Body Peace Kit” from <http://womenshealthclinic.org/nodietday/>

May 12 is *Chronic Fatigue Syndrome Day*, planned to raise awareness of long-term immunological and neurological disorders, which include Chronic Fatigue Syndrome. For more info: <https://www.may12th.org/>

May 13-18 is *Woman’s Health Week* and starts on Mother’s Day every year. You can find lots of information and free resources at <https://www.womenshealth.gov/nwhw>

May is *National Hepatitis Awareness Month* and **May 19** is *Hepatitis Testing Day*. The CDC recommends Hepatitis C testing for people born 1945-1965. Find a short online assessment and free resources at www.cdc.gov/hepatitis/heppromoresources.htm

May 21-25 is *Bike to Work Week*. Data, posters, and other promotional materials are available from: <https://bikeleague.org/bikemonth>



Journaling as a Wellness Tool

Maintaining a **diary** or **journal** is a technique to support *emotional* wellness that has been in use for centuries. One common way people use a journal is to record ideas or issues that frustrate them during the day, so they can relieve themselves of carrying the issue in their heads and hearts. Another technique, which some identify as spanning the emotional and *spiritual* dimensions, is a “gratitude journal.” A person keeping a gratitude journal often takes time daily to write of the things they did, received, or encountered during the day that made them feel grateful or fortunate. This can be especially helpful to a person whose negative mood or depression creates challenges in completing their daily activities or limits their sense of enjoyment or satisfaction. One person we know reports when she feels very depressed she writes in her journal a listing all the things she is thankful for.

Moving from the *emotional* to the *physical* dimension, journaling can be used to move activities from the automatic to the mindful. One example of this is the keeping of a food diary, log, or journal. Research⁵ demonstrates that recording a food diary can help people get better control of their eating, even if they don't do it every day. Food logs or journals are widely available in bookstores, are part of the popular Weight Watchers® weight control program and are available as apps for smart phones.

Journals are used in many other ways to help people manage health conditions and improve their communication with supporters and professionals. People with diabetes may keep a journal of their eating, physical activity, medication use, blood glucose readings, and any other symptoms. A detailed journal or log can help people wanting to improve their sleep and manage other health challenges. Journals are also used to help people manage pain conditions, breathing problems, and a variety of other health issues.⁶



Journaling about topics that are interesting or inspiring can support *intellectual* wellness. Journals are a key tool used in schools to help people structure their creative writing, graphic arts, and other academic pursuits. Popular memoirs may have started as someone's journal.

The extensive journal/diary sections in larger bookstores often contain several examples of “gratitude journals.” Some include a combination of inspirational quotes, artwork, and/or structured questions or sections.

If you'd like to try journaling, start with our booklet, *Journaling: A Wellness Tool*, free from <https://www.center4healthandsdc.org/journaling-tool.html>

Music for Wellness

Many people find listening to and/or making music helps their emotional wellness. In addition,⁷ music can boost wellness in other dimensions; spiritual, intellectual, social (when you join with others), and even physical (when you dance, alone or with others, or exercise to music).

Listening to music can enrich your environment, help you focus on the task at hand, or create a time for relaxing. Making music can be a chance to develop a new skill and challenge your mind, if you are working on playing an instrument. Singing is another way to make music. A small study⁸ found that singing in a group helped participants improve or maintain their mental health and well-being.



For a truly inspiring story, check out the Australian Choir of Hard Knocks on YouTube and also at their website

<http://www.choirofhopeandinspiration.com/our-journey>

How can music be useful? Try any of these musical tips:

- Listen to energizing music while exercising and see how fast the time goes, or how it affects your drive to perform during the workout.
- Listen to relaxing music while studying and see how it affects your attention.
- Listen to relaxing music while reading or writing.
- Listen to relaxing music while meditating or before going to bed.

Self-Assessment

Emotional Wellness involves the ability and skills to express feelings, enjoy life, adjust to emotional challenges, cope with stress, and recover from traumatic life experiences. Rate each item using this scale:

- 4 If the item is **Always True** for you
- 3 If the item is **Sometimes True** for you
- 2 If the item is **Rarely True** for you
- 1 If the item is **Never True** for you

- ___ I accept responsibility for my actions.
- ___ I see challenges as opportunities for growth.
- ___ I believe that I have considerable control over my life.
- ___ I feel good about myself.
- ___ I am able to effectively cope with stress and tension.
- ___ I make time for hobbies or leisure pursuits.
- ___ I am able to recognize my personal shortcomings and learn from my mistakes.
- ___ I am able to recognize and express my feelings.
- ___ I express gratitude daily for the gifts I have.
- ___ I am able to forgive people who distress me.
- ___ I view myself as a strong person.
- ___ I do things to increase my emotional wellness, such as listening to music, walking, meditation, etc.

_____ **Total Score** (out of a possible 48)

SCORING KEY

- ✓ If you scored from 30 to 48 points, that's excellent! You are clearly doing a lot for your emotional wellness.
- ✓ If you scored from 15 to 29 points, you're doing great though you can look over the items again and see where there are 2-3 areas you want to improve.
- ✓ If you scored from 0 to 14 points, review your responses, to see if there is one area you may want to improve. Read over some of the tips in this issue of Words of Wellness. Consider one things you may want to do. Build on what you are already doing well.

Wellness Tips

Here are some ideas to consider to strengthen your emotional wellness.

Stress and Tension

Sometimes you can prevent feeling stressed through better time management or organizing your belongings. If possible, avoid situations and people trigger you. Deep breathing and relaxation activities can help, along with yoga or journaling (see articles in this issue). A short self-compassion meditation or a walk outside can shift your perspective. Remember, you may not be able to avoid all stressors, but you may be able to change how they affect your emotional and spiritual dimensions!

Leisure Activities

Use your free time to do something enjoyable and different from your work and other daily tasks. Creative activities, like art or crafts, can give you a sense of accomplishment while reducing your stress level. Try spending time with others and creative time alone to see what is best for you. Think about the hobbies or activity you did when you were young. See the article on music in this issue for another way to boost your wellness.

Taking Charge

We can never have complete control over life—things do happen that we don't expect. Sometimes these present challenges. At other times, such surprises bring gifts. Consider the Serenity Prayer, which focuses on *accepting what you can't change and changing what you can*. *Recognizing* where you have control in your life and taking charge of those areas will help you realize there is a lot that you *do/can* control. We know from experience that, when we take charge of our wellness self-care, we can feel better.

Gratitude

Feeling grateful and "counting your blessings" has been the advice of many religions and wise grandparents over many centuries. You might try a gratitude journal (see the article in this issue). Recently, scientists are getting on board and showing that gratitude is good for you.

Gratitude, continued from page 3



Listen to “The Science of Gratitude” radio show for more information. This one-hour special, narrated by Susan Sarandon, can be accessed online from The Greater Good Science Center (search for “science of gratitude” at <https://ggsc.berkeley.edu>), where you also can find a podcast on “The Science of Happiness.”

We recently discovered a five-minute video on gratitude that we encourage you to share widely. The narrator is Brother David Steindl-Rast, a Benedictine monk, and the video, available on YouTube, is called “A Good Day.”

What We're Reading: Mindfulness as a Wellness Tool

Happiness the Mindful Way – A Practical Guide

by Ken Verni, PsyD (2015) NY: Penguin Random House

Did you know that you can actively work towards happiness through step-by-step exercises? The secret is mindfulness—being in the moment, in awareness, without judging your thoughts and feelings. In his book, *Practical Mindfulness*, Dr. Verni presents a well-illustrated and easy-to-use guide on how to incorporate mindfulness practices into your daily life. He explains how mindfulness can assist you in many ways, including how “staying focused at work and being more productive and satisfied, can be a preparation for physical activity by helping motivation, and can help develop a negotiating style that focuses far more on the relationship, creative solutions, and preparing the ground for future cooperation.”

Mindfulness is purposefully paying attention in the present moment and bringing a nonjudgmental, compassionate awareness to the nature of things. Dr. Verni says this is a rediscovery or a remembering of our natural, inborn capacity to be fully awake in our lives, in contact with things in a direct way without the filters of concepts, past experiences, or likes and dislikes. Whether struggling with our own life challenges, or with providing care to someone dealing with the many facets of disability, we can become overwhelmed. Mindfulness is a practice that can assist in “developing a greater comfort with and receptivity to the sensations and emotions present in our bodies, moment by moment.” This openness and awareness allow “greater access to our inner wisdom and... the self-confidence to follow our intuitive wisdom, take skillful action, and not wind up overwhelmed by the demands of work, school, family, friends and career/social pursuits.”

Being in the moment, aware of your own feelings and thoughts while purposely thinking in a nonjudgmental way can create the space to choose a thoughtful/mindful response. Instead of just reacting to events or other people, you can calmly and considerately evaluate your response, giving yourself the time to use your personal resources of active listening and caring, to store energy and direct it toward positive action and communication. Mindfulness is a tool we can use and encourage others we support to learn so we are able to better experience and enjoy life.

¹ The article on yoga is based on an article by Maureen Bodnar in a previous issue of *Words of Wellness*.

² References on the benefits of yoga include: (1) Gard, T., Noggle, J. J., Park, C. L., Vago, D. R., & Wilson, A. (2014). Potential self-regulatory mechanism of yoga for psychological health. *Frontiers in Human Neuroscience*, 8(article 770), 1-20. (2) Harkness, K. N., Delfabbro, P., Mortimer, J., Hannaford, Z., & Cohen-Woods, S. (2017). Brief report on the psychophysiological effects of a yoga intervention for chronic stress. *Journal of Psychophysiology*, 31(1), 38-48. (3) Find more facts and references at the National Center for Complementary and Integrative Health at <https://nccih.nih.gov/health/yoga/introduction.htm#hed5>

³ <https://kamengshambhala.wordpress.com/2016/12/14/the-history-of-yoga-in-antiquity/>

⁴ The text *Hatha Yoga Pradipika* was written by Yogi Svamarama.

⁵ (1) Burke, L. E., Wang, J., & Sevick, M. A. (2011). Self-monitoring in weight loss: A systematic review of the literature. *Journal of the American Dietetic Association*, 111(1), 92-102. (2) Teasdale, N., Elhoussein, A., Butcher, F., Piernas, C., Cowburn, G., Hartmann-Boyce, J., Saksean, R. & Scarborough, P. (2018). Systematic review and meta-analysis of remotely delivered interventions using self-monitoring or tailored feedback to change dietary behavior. *American Journal of Clinical Nutrition*, 107(2), 247-256.

⁶ See, for example, Smyth, J. M., Stone, A. A., Hurewitz, A., & Kaell, A. (1999). Effects of writing about stressful experiences on symptom reduction in patients with asthma or rheumatoid arthritis: A randomized trial. *Journal of the American Medical Association*; 281(14), 1304-1309.

⁷ The section on music is based on article by Jen Cohn, from *Words of Wellness*, March 2012 (Vol. 5, No.9).

⁸ Shakespeare, T., & Whieldon, A. (2017). Sing Your Heart Out: community singing as part of mental health recovery. *Medical Humanities*, Published Online First:25 November 2017.

Graphics are from openclipart.org

