

August is National Wellness Month: but what is “wellness”?

Erin Ridout

Domestic Violence & Community Health Project Manager

So, what is *wellness* and how do you *do* it? It's the little things. Eating fruits and veggies, moving your body, getting outdoors, drinking water. It's also the big things. Keeping up with medical and dental appointments. Your relationships with others. Your relationship with yourself.

Wellness is different than our efforts to avoid being unhealthy or avoid being sick. It is something much bigger – it is our overall picture. Wellness is about the choices you make to do things that fulfill you. Wellness is comprised of daily acts and choices toward being happy and healthy. Moving the needle from 'getting there' to 'being there.' Wellness includes your social life, what's around you, what you are thinking, what you are feeling, what you believe in, how your work fulfills you, how your body feels, and how secure you feel.

Wellness moves us beyond the avoidance of illness and into healthier and happier existence. It is not a state you achieve (how are you? I am well), it is an ever-evolving, continuous process of growth.

There are many ways to engage in your own wellness. There are certainly books, videos, websites, and classes that may help you move yourself in the right direction, but I want to focus on something small you can start doing today. At the end of your day, as you get into bed or brush your teeth (dental health!), take 1 minute to think about what went well for you today. You can think about it, or you can go an extra step and write it down. What were your positives from the day? Jot them down quickly. One minute is all you need. Taking a moment to pause and reflect does two things. First, you end your day thinking about the good stuff. Even if it was a terrible day, you are writing down maybe the one thing that actually was not terrible. Second, over time, you will start to see a pattern emerge. You'll see the things in your life that make YOU feel good. For some, it may be a social connection – being with friends and family. For others, it may be exercise, a great meal, playing with your children. It may be that you knocked that one big report off your to-do list, that you helped others, or that you are seeing the seeds you have planted bloom (literally or metaphorically).

Now I believe this recognition of the stuff that makes you smile at the end of your day, this alone, can promote a feeling of increased wellness. But if you care to go one step further with me, once you start to pull out those things that make you feel good at the end of the day, **do them more**. Seek those things out. Especially on days that feel crummy. Days that are hard. When it's been raining all week (again, literally or metaphorically) – do the things that you value and take note of the 1-2 things that actually have worked out and made you feel good.

So action steps (because wellness takes action):

- 1) Note what makes you feel good; brings you joy; fills your cup
- 2) Do the above more

Your health is important, but your wellness is everything.