Wellness From Within: The First Step

A guide to how you can use your everyday choices to enhance your health and well-being.

Published by the

AMERICAN HOLISTIC HEALTH ASSOCIATION

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American Holistic Health Association
PO Box 17400
Anaheim, California 92817-7400
www.ahha.org

The American Holistic Health Association (AHHA) is *the leading national resource connecting people with vital solutions for reaching a higher level of wellness. AHHA is a nonprofit association without affiliation with any product, service, or method of healthcare delivery.*

Edited and Designed by:
Sandra Caton
Lake Arrowhead, CA

Illustrated by:
Mike St. Clair • Serigraphics
Riverside, CA

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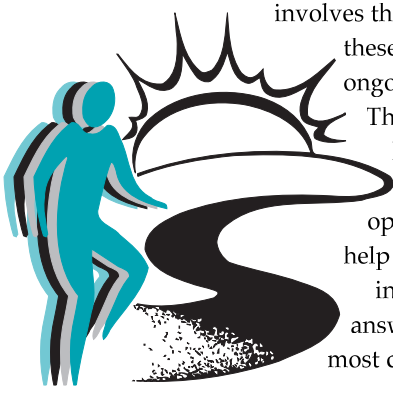
Wellness From Within:
The First Step

If you could choose to enjoy better health, would you be interested? Do increased energy, greater enthusiasm, and an enhanced sense of well-being appeal to you? How about a greater sense of joy?

The good news is, these things are possible for you. Within yourself, you have the power you need to create wellness in your life. That power is your power of choice.

Health is more than the absence of disease

According to the World Health Organization, "Health is more than the absence of disease. Health is a state of optimal well-being." Optimal well-being is a concept of health that goes beyond the curing of *illness* to one of achieving *wellness*. Achieving wellness requires balancing the various aspects of the whole person. These aspects are physical, emotional, mental, and spiritual. This broader, (w)holistic approach to health involves the integration of all of these aspects and is an ongoing process.



The American Holistic Health Association (AHHA) has developed this booklet to help you achieve wellness in your life. It will answer some of the most commonly asked

questions about the holistic approach to health and wellness and start you on your path to optimal well-being.

Your health is your responsibility

Many of us have been brought up to believe that our health depends solely on the quality of the healthcare we receive. The truth is, your health is *your* responsibility. You are the only person who can make the lifestyle decisions that contribute to your well-being. You are the one who must take the steps to preserve your health and promote your wellness. Only you have the power to create wellness for yourself.

Your power lies in the choices you make every day on your own behalf. If you react out of habit or fixed attitudes, you may not be using your choices wisely to create wellness in your life. To create wellness you must expand your focus beyond mere physical health, and:

- Strive to balance and integrate your physical, emotional, mental, and spiritual aspects
- Establish respectful, cooperative relationships with your family, friends, community, and the environment
- Gather information and make informed wellness-oriented lifestyle choices
- Actively participate in your health decisions and healing process.

Your wellness team

To understand wellness, it helps to think of yourself as a team made up of several members. For the team to be effective, each member (each aspect of yourself) must have its needs met and must work in harmony with the other team members. These aspects of yourself are:

- **Physical you** (your body)—your tangible structure and the five senses which enable you to touch, see, hear, smell, and taste the world around you
- **Emotional you** (your feelings)—your range of emotions from fear and anger to love and joy
- **Mental you** (your thoughts)—your knowledge, attitudes, and beliefs; your analytical self
- **Spiritual you** (your spirit)—your relationship with yourself, your creativity, your life purpose, and your relationship with a Higher Power.

All of these aspects work together to make you a whole person. What happens to one aspect can affect all the other aspects. That's why being confined to bed with a sore back (physical) can lead to depression (emotional), or why denying your anger (emotional) can lead to a headache (physical). This relationship between your different aspects is often referred to as the mind/body connection.

Since all four parts of you must work in harmony to achieve

wellness, each part needs your attention and care to perform at its best.

- The **physical** you requires good nutrition, appropriate weight, beneficial exercise, and adequate rest.
- The **emotional** you needs to give and receive forgiveness, love and compassion; needs to laugh and experience happiness; needs joyful relationships with yourself and others.
- The **mental** you needs self-supportive attitudes, positive thoughts and viewpoints, and a positive self-image.
- The **spiritual** you requires inner calmness, openness to your creativity, and trust in your inner knowing.

The captain of the team

A comfortable, healthy balance between your physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual aspects doesn't happen accidentally. Someone has to be in charge, and that someone is always you.

Your behavior and the choices you make in your life affect your health. You can choose to do more of what's good for you and the world around you, and to do less of what is harmful. You can choose to learn more about your health and the variety of healthcare options available, and you can choose how you will react in a given situation.

In order to make wise choices, however, you must know what changes you may need to make. To help you determine your current degree of wellness, take the following short quiz. Do not judge yourself by your answers. Simply accept yourself as you are at this moment, knowing that tomorrow is a new day and that you can always make new choices that will take you closer to the wellness you desire.

Wellness Quiz

	YES	NO
Do you wake up with enthusiasm for the day ahead?	☐	☐
Do you have the high energy you need to do what you want?	☐	☐
Do you laugh easily and often, especially at yourself?	☐	☐
Do you confidently find solutions for the challenges in your life?	☐	☐
Do you feel valued and appreciated?	☐	☐
Do you appreciate others and let them know it?	☐	☐
Do you have a circle of warm, caring friends?	☐	☐
Do the choices you make every day get you what you want?	☐	☐

If you answered "no" to any of these questions, congratulations! You have identified areas in your life that you may want to change. This can be valuable information.

Know your team

To enhance your health you must be aware of yourself. When any aspect of your "self" is out of balance, it will let you know.

- Be aware of your body—what makes it feel good and what makes it hurt. Learn to listen to your body when it communicates.
- Be aware of your emotions—which people or activities cause you to feel happy, loving, connected, and which create feelings of anger, fear, depression.
- Be aware of your thoughts—which thoughts make you smile and feel good, and which bring a frown or cause your muscles to tighten.
- Be aware of your spiritual condition—what causes you to feel inner peace, joy, a sense that all is right with the world. Be aware of the intuitive thoughts which guide you to your highest good and bring the gift of creativity.

Caring for the team

When you are conscious of your physical, emotional, mental, and spiritual condition you can act quickly to prevent illness if one or more of these aspects is out of balance.

For example, working on a challenging project can be exciting and stimulating. Sometimes, however, we will work past the point of exhaustion,

neglecting our physical body's need for food and rest, neglecting our emotional need for connection to others, and neglecting our spiritual need for quiet time. This sort of imbalance can lead to illness or disease (dis-ease) in one form or another. Some of us may find ourselves crying easily for no apparent reason. Others may catch a cold or develop stomach problems. Still others may find themselves bingeing on junk food or yelling at their mate.

When this happens, it's time to call "time out." Stop working and take a long, peaceful walk. Or, meet a special friend for a relaxed lunch or dinner, go to a concert, or watch a movie. It doesn't matter what you do, as long as it is something beneficial that will rest and refresh the neglected and overworked team members.

By giving every member of your team a chance to participate, you can help yourself be well. With teamwork, you can avoid burnout from overwork, resentment from giving too much of your time to others, physical problems from inactivity or stress, spiritual emptiness from lack of time spent in reflection.

Training your team

We've already talked about the fact that the physical, emotional, mental, and spiritual aspects of yourself must be in balance for optimal well-being. But what exactly do we mean? What sorts of activities and choices lead to wellness? The following suggestions are some of the specific things you can do to enhance your health and promote your own wellness.

PHYSICAL:

- **Eat fresh, wholesome food.** Avoid or limit sugar, salt, and fatty foods. Replace processed foods with fresh vegetables and whole grains as much as possible.
- **Drink lots of pure water.** In many localities, where tap water is not pure, you may need to invest in a water filtration system or drink bottled water.
- **Take time for *enjoyable* exercise.** Some find it helpful to join a gym or lift weights. Others find activities such as dancing, walking, bicycling, and skating enjoyable and beneficial.

  The important thing is to get at least 20 minutes of exercise three times a week.
- **Get adequate rest.** Many people do not realize that too little sleep may be the reason for inattentiveness or lack of motivation. Experiment to find out what your natural rhythm is and how much sleep you need to feel your best.

EMOTIONAL:

- **Laugh, play, and have fun often.** Laughter is good medicine, and the ability to play is a necessity for a balanced life.
- **Share your feelings with others.** Spend time with the people you can trust with your feelings and give them the gift of really knowing you.
- **Create warm, loving relationships.** Forgive yourself and others. If you have issues or grievances with family and friends, face the issues and recover lost emotional closeness.

MENTAL:

- **Explore new ideas.** Find a hobby, take a class, read a nonfiction book, watch educational television.
- **Cultivate positive attitudes.** Instead of criticizing, catch yourself and others at being good. Look for what is positive in a situation.
- **Examine your beliefs.** Listen to other points of view. When others disagree with you, try to see things through their eyes.

SPIRITUAL:

- **Take time to be quiet with yourself.** Meditate, pray, or go fishing. We each get in touch with our inner selves or a Higher Power in different ways.
- **Be open to your creativity.** Learn to trust your innate creativity and intuitive thinking. Express the inner you.
- **Savor the moment.** Enjoy what you are doing now, instead of reliving the past or anticipating the future.

Be a participant—not a spectator

No one's life is perfect. We all have difficult situations, hard times, losses to deal with. But some people's lives seem to work better than others. Have you ever wondered why?

An important difference is in how they react to what happens to them. We always have a choice. In the game of life, the active participant comes out a winner, while the passive spectator is often the loser.

When we allow and accept *everything* that happens to us as though we have no choice, we are taking a passive role in our lives. The feeling that we are victims of circumstances, that we have no choice but to accept our lot in life, leaves us feeling helpless, hopeless, and depressed. These negative emotions can cause our physical self to fall down on its job of taking care of itself and fighting off disease.

Knowing you have a choice in how you respond in a given situation empowers you to choose what is good for you. Sometimes we may choose to accept what happens and go on with our business. Other times, it may be best to confront the situation and make our anger, hurt, or confusion known. Even if you have been passive in the past, in the future you can choose to be active.

You can learn that it's normal for others to see things

differently than you do and, as an active participant in life, you can learn to accept differences and find something in common that allows you to work together for the good of all concerned.

You can decide how you will get your needs met and work in cooperation with others to accomplish what is wanted.

You can let others know how you wish to be treated and what you will and will not accept. Only you can set boundaries for yourself.

Learning to respond differently may not happen overnight. Begin by being more aware of how you are reacting to various people and events. You can try different responses until you find the ones that work for you. With practice, your heightened sense of awareness, coupled with your power of choice, will help you establish new behaviors and create wellness.

Motivating your team

By now, you are probably beginning to realize that achieving wellness in your life will involve changing some of your behaviors. However, human beings are creatures of habit and ingrained attitudes. It takes a strong desire to overcome our natural resistance to change, but the more we want to change, the

easier change becomes.

We usually change our behavior or attitudes for one of two reasons:

- We are afraid of what will happen if we ***don't*** change, or
- We are excited about what will happen if we ***do*** change.

While fear is a useful motivator when we are in immediate danger, it is not a good motivator for long-term change. People who change their habits out of fear often find themselves backsliding and returning to their old ways. Even people who have survived a life-threatening illness may find it difficult to maintain the kind of lifestyle necessary to promote continued health.

When we change because we genuinely want to experience the positive results of change, we are much more likely to succeed. Anyone who smokes cigarettes knows how difficult it is to break the habit, but every year thousands of expectant mothers do it out of love for their unborn child.

Your winning team needs a goal

To reach your wellness goals you must first define what wellness is for you. A computer programmer, a new mother, someone who is physically challenged, a tree trimmer, and a retiree might each picture different wellness goals to support their individual lifestyles.

What kind of lifestyle do you have now? What kind do you want? Think about what isn't working for you. Think about what you want to change. Be specific.

Take a moment now to write down your wellness goals. For each goal, list all the positive benefits you will gain by reaching your goals. For example, quit smoking:

Benefits: *easier breathing, more socially desirable, a kissable mouth, whiter teeth, more money to spend on clothes or entertainment*

Don't leave anything out, no matter how silly it may seem. Remember not to use fear as an inducement. In other words, do not list "reduce risk of cancer" as a reason to quit smoking, even though it may be true.

Don't get stuck by labeling your choices as either right or wrong. Just choose what is appropriate for you.

On the next pages are some wellness practices you might consider. Put a check mark next to those you want to include.

My Wellness Goals

☐ Look for the positive in every situation.
Benefits: _____

_____

_____

☐ Be aware of my thoughts and feelings.
Benefits: _____

_____

_____

☐ Eat a healthy diet.
Benefits: _____

_____

_____

☐ Value myself and my creativity.
Benefits: _____

_____

_____

☐ Exercise regularly.
Benefits: _____

_____

_____

☐ Avoid alcohol, tobacco, and other drugs.
Benefits: _____

_____

_____

☐ Stay open to new ideas.
Benefits: _____

_____

_____

☐ Get adequate rest.
Benefits: _____

_____

_____

☐ Accept change willingly.
Benefits: _____

_____

_____

☐ Express emotions appropriately.
Benefits: _____

_____

_____

☐ Make decisions based on what I think is best.
Benefits: _____

_____

_____

☐ Respect myself and others.
Benefits: _____

_____

_____

List any additional goals and benefits here:

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

Taking the first step

Once you have determined your personal wellness goals, it is time to decide what changes you must make to achieve them. Be patient with yourself. Creating wellness is an ongoing process. As you make more beneficial choices and fewer harmful ones, you gradually tip the scales toward wellness. You can reach your wellness goals, even difficult ones, one step at a time.

The most important step is the first one. Ask yourself which change will benefit you the most. Are you willing to make this change? If so, get started on your path to wellness by making this your first step.

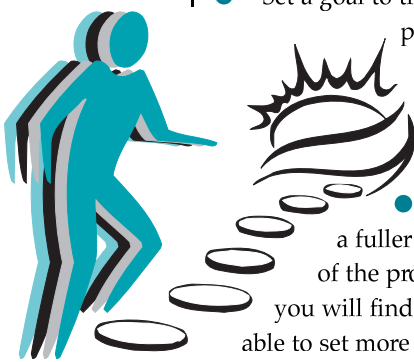
There are a number of ways to go about changing your habits and lifestyle.

- **Practice a beneficial activity more frequently.** You could remember to smile more often, especially at people who look like they need cheering up.
- **Launch a new activity which is beneficial.** You might stop at a park on your way home from work and spend a few minutes to relax and unwind.
- **Replace an unhealthy choice with a beneficial one.** Instead of ordering a carbonated beverage or another cup of coffee, have a glass of water or fruit juice.
- **Eliminate a harmful choice.** If you are a smoker, quit. This could be the most important health decision you ever make.

- **Reduce harmful practices gradually.** If you have a strong sweet tooth and are not ready to completely eliminate sugar from your diet, just eat less of it as a start.

As you begin to make the changes needed to achieve and enjoy your wellness, keep these important points in mind:

- Achieving wellness is a continuing series of small steps, taken one day at a time. Since wellness isn't going to happen in a day, make a commitment to continue discovering the most appropriate methods and actions for you.
- Look for opportunities to make choices regarding behavior, fitness, and work style. As you become consciously aware of lifestyle choices, you will notice opportunities you were unaware of before.
- Understand that only active participation gets results. Each day is a fresh start as you take steps toward meeting your goals.
- At the end of each day, review and acknowledge what worked. Learn from what didn't work. Allow yourself to be human, not perfect.
- Set a goal to try one new positive action each day or each week, depending on what works for you.
- As you develop a fuller understanding of the process involved, you will find that you are able to set more specific goals.



Calling on the reinforcements

Although the decision to change your lifestyle to support wellness must come from you, there are many sources available to help you along the way. The more you learn about health and wellness, the easier it will be for you to know which changes to make and the best way to implement those changes. Educational materials, resource organizations, local programs, and a wide range of healthcare practitioners are some of the resources available to assist you.

EDUCATIONAL MATERIALS

Check your local library or bookstore for books, cassettes, magazines, videos, and other self-help information. Scanning the topics of health, wellness, psychology, nutrition, and exercise will get you started.

LOCAL RESOURCES

Most communities have regularly scheduled lectures, workshops, and seminars on health-related topics. Check your newspaper and the community educational system to find out what's available in your area.

ORGANIZATIONS

Many special interest groups exist which promote various aspects of health and wellness.

In addition, there are organizations, such as the American Holistic Health Association, which can link you to useful health information sources.

AHHA's resource lists include referrals to various types of healthcare practitioners, research services for conventional and alternative treatment of specific diseases, and catalogs of self-help publications.

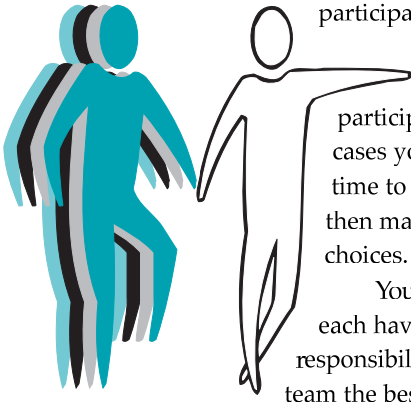
HEALTHCARE PRACTITIONERS

Find practitioners who are willing to help you reach your wellness goals—those who can coach you and your team effectively. Establish a *partnership* relationship with these practitioners by being an active participant.

The patient/practitioner partnership

Healthcare assistance is available from a wide variety of practitioners. Acupuncturists, chiropractors, dentists, marriage and family counselors, medical doctors, naturopathic doctors, nutritionists, nurses, and psychologists are just a few. No one medical or health professional has all the answers for all conditions. Discovering what each has to offer will expand your choices.

No matter what type of practitioner you choose, your participation is vital. Even in an emergency you can still participate. In most cases you will have ample time to ask questions and then make well-informed choices.



You and your practitioner each have specific roles and responsibilities in making your team the best it can be.

Your role is to:

Communicate your concerns to the practitioner:

- Bring notes regarding your concerns and what led up to this visit.
- Have a list of your current medications and dosages, as well as any nutritional supplements you are taking.
- Describe your symptoms and concerns briefly, but thoroughly.
- Share what else is going on in your life and how you feel about it. (Divorce, death of a loved one, job change, etc.)

Understand the situation and ask for options:

- Listen carefully and take notes.
- Ask questions until you understand what you need to know.
- Ask what options are available, what the practitioner recommends, and why.

Make an informed choice:

- Learn as much as necessary, contacting other sources of information if needed.
- Consider consequences of proposed treatment options.
- Get a second opinion if appropriate.
- Understand how much each will cost and what your insurance will cover.
- Choose the treatment and/or actions you believe will work best for you.
- Determine the best source to provide this treatment.

Take action

- Commit to the chosen treatment program and/or the changes you are going to make.
- Be an active participant. Do your part.
- Work with all members of your "team."
- Be open to changing or modifying your program, if what you chose isn't working.

Practitioner's role is to:

Assess the situation and explain it to you:

- Read what you've written.
- Listen carefully to what you say.
- Review your symptoms, carry out exam, order necessary tests.
- Look for correlations to what else is going on in your life.
- Form an opinion regarding your condition and possible causes.
- Explain these to you in understandable terms.

Explain options for addressing the situation:

- Present treatment choices and/or action needed.
- Explain expected benefits and possible side effects—now and in the future.
- Suggest what you can do to help yourself.
- Tell you what might happen if nothing is changed.
- Acknowledge that there may be other options.
- Be open to your desire for a second opinion.
- Answer your questions.

Support your recovery:

- Provide the chosen treatment.
- Refer you to appropriate practitioners.

It's your choice

From this booklet, you have learned that creating wellness in your life means learning about your options, choosing what is best for you, and acting on those choices.

All of us have incredible inner wisdom. As you gather information and experience, you will gain confidence in using your inner knowing to follow your path to wellness.

In the past you may have thought there was nothing you could do. *Now you know there are many options to choose from in any situation.*

In the past you may have thought you had to do it the way someone else said it should be done. *Now you know you can choose your own path and methods.*

In the past you may have thought that someone else was in control. *Now you know that you are in charge and your choices give you the power to create wellness in your life.*

In the past you may have thought you had to change all at once. *Now you know the path to wellness is taken one step at a time.*

Are you ready to take your first step?

You are invited to sign and date this special commitment.

MY WELLNESS COMMITMENT TO MYSELF

I promise to make choices each day that will take me further along the path to enjoying wellness.

My first step will be to _____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

Signed _____

Dated _____

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American Holistic Health Association
PO Box 17400
Anaheim, CA 92817-7400
(714) 779-6152
mail@ahha.org
www.ahha.org