

Wellness Checklist

By Tish Vincent

In this busy life, I appreciate magazine articles that reduce the ideas they present to a checklist of important points. This month, I offer six essentials to increase wellness:

(1) Sleep

Sleep has been called the *gentle tyrant*. Eight hours a night is ideal. Sleep less than that and the body begins to churn out cortisol, brains get foggy, and emotions become labile. Advice from sleep experts is familiar to many of us but bears repeating. Refrain from caffeine after 4 p.m. Get a little light exercise in the hours before bed. Go to bed at the same time every night and arise at the same time every morning. If you find it difficult to fall asleep, learn some meditation techniques to still your mind. If none of this works, consult a sleep specialist and seek the advice of a health care professional.

(2) Nutrition

Our culture sends many confusing advertising messages about food. We see images of tempting food on television followed by images of underweight women advertising diet plans. A visit to a nutritionist is sometimes needed to sort through all the messages and develop a suitable eating plan. Basically, a food plan that includes three meals a day consisting of a protein, grain, vegetable, and fruit will keep you in good health. Eliminating or limiting processed snack foods and carbonated beverages is wise.

(3) Exercise

Exercise increases circulation and oxygenation of the blood, lifts your mood, and

increases the amount of human growth hormone released by your body, resulting in more sound sleep. A daily habit of vigorous walking for 30 minutes can vastly improve an individual's wellness and feeling of well-being. Busy law students, attorneys, and judges need to make time for exercise every day.

(4) Emotional Intelligence

"Emotional intelligence...refers to the ability to perceive, control and evaluate emotions."¹ To perceive emotion accurately, we must have a working knowledge of ourselves emotionally. We must recognize when we are feeling fear, anger, love, or sadness. Studying human responses can increase awareness of our own emotions. Therapy, support groups, and other group activities increase our emotional awareness. Controlling our feelings does not mean making them stop; it means recognizing, experiencing, and containing them. When individuals control their emotions, they become much more skilled and resilient when dealing with strong emotions in themselves and others. Evaluating feelings implies perceiving and using other methods of communication to determine the emotions of others or accepting another person's emotional expression but not taking it personally.

(5) Community Involvement

Human beings are social creatures. We need to relate to one another, see one another, and contribute to the well-being of others. Individuals who are isolated experience a decrease in their emotional well-being. Become active in community organizations that are important to you, such as a local or affinity bar association, neighborhood book group, church, or sports team.

(6) Spiritual Health

The paths to spiritual health are diverse; there is no one way to arrive in this state of being. When we experience spiritual health, we are serene, realistic about our strengths and weaknesses, and accepting of others. We may approach spiritual health through organized religion, meditation, yoga, 12-step groups, or other paths. Addiction has been defined as a spiritual wound; in my years of working with addicted people I have seen this wound heal. It is an amazing testimony to the power of the spirit and the danger of ignoring our spiritual well-being.

This six-point checklist is a quick way to assess your self-care daily or weekly. Regardless of the demands of your education or profession, your wellness needs to be your first commitment each day. ■



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FOOTNOTE

1. Kendra Cherry, *What is Emotional Intelligence? Definitions, History, and Measures of Emotional Intelligence* <<http://psychology.about.com/od/personalitydevelopment/a/emotionalintell.htm>> (accessed January 23, 2013).