

Healthy, Wealthy and Wise

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What is health and wellness all about? In its most basic definition "health" means the absence of disease while "wellness" implies another notch up in well being from avoiding the sniffles. Webster's New World Dictionary describes "wellness" as the condition of being healthy and sound, especially as the result of proper diet and exercise. Yet the term has come to mean much more. In *High Level Wellness*, written in the 1950s, Dr. Halbert Dunn included states of physical, emotional, psychological and spiritual being. Wholistic Health has taken off since that time. Rather than medicate away the discomfort of the common cold, more and more we want to operate in awareness of the interconnectedness between mind, body, emotion and our environment.

What would happen if you and your family played more? Laughed more? Communicated more effectively? Breathed deeply and relaxed more often? Regularly took walks with one another? Probably wellness would become a life style.

Some experts believe that about eighty percent of the ailments that walk through a physician's office could be alleviated by lifestyle and/or internal, emotional resolution. I agree. When I was a young mother with three children I was frequently ill with irritated bowel syndrome attacks, skin rashes, digestive problems, flues and headaches. They were often created by my internal critical self talk and inability to attend to my emotions. To achieve wellness for ourselves and our family we need to attend to the whole of who we and our loved ones are.

There are some basic trends and problems which deserve attention. Time Magazine reported in January 2002 that while millions of children in the world are dying of starvation in North America 13% of children between the ages of six and 11 years are overweight. Those same children are watching an average of twenty 20 hours of television a week. In a recent book from The Vanier Institute of the Family called *From the Kitchen Table to the Boardroom Table: The Canadian Family and the Work Place*, Clarence Lochhead says "Families need . . . a total of 76.8 weeks to pay for all of their expenses." He is referring to 76.8 weeks of employment a year for the average earning family to pay typical bills. This requires more than one income earner. So the family has a lot of stress.

We have the information about the reality of the situation and we typically know the remedies. We require commitment to follow through. Isn't it interesting that the diet industry makes billions of dollars on books and programs when we know if we want to lose weight we must eat less and exercise more? Here are some wellness guidelines

I have learned from *The Wellness Workbook* by John Travis, *RealAge* by Dr. Michael Roizen, *Chatelaine* magazine, *Stress and the Healthy Family* by Dolores Curran, *Relax, You May Only Have a Few Minutes Left* by Loretta LaRoche, my children, grandchildren, exercise classes and my own basket of aches and groans.

Physical Wellness

Nutrition:

- Limit the three nasty whites--white sugar, salt and flour.
- Drink lots of water -- 6 to 8 glasses a day.
- Allow young children to have smaller and more frequent meals.
- Allow for variation in food intake. Sometimes children are experiencing a growth spurt.
- Involve children in meal preparation. They're more likely to eat the carrot they peeled.
- Avoid calling salty and sugary foods "a treat".
- Include a variety of vegetables, fruits and whole wheats in meal planning.
- For adults limit caffeine and alcohol intake.

Movement:

- Avoid passivity. Get the family away from the television and engage in activity.
- Dance, walk, swim, crawl or move in some way twenty minutes, at least, three times a week.

Breathe:

- Periodically, breathe deeply and let a big sigh come out to release tension.
- Laugh.

Intellectual Wellness

Brain Care:

- Have discussions at meal times. Some families share high lights and low lights of the day.
- Ask open ended questions of what, where, when, who and how.
- Support the right brain with creative activities and brain storming solutions to personal and family problems.
- Support the left brain with sharing information and learning new skills.
- Limit television viewing. The brain has more activity during sleep than when television watching.

Senses:

- Regularly include family activities that stimulate and satisfy the senses of vision, sound, touch and smell.

- Define which sensory modality best supports your children’s learning. Is it visual, auditory or experiential? Take this into consideration during teachable moments.

Emotional Wellness

Play:

- Take some time and “waste” it well.
- Avoid having an over scheduled family. Everyone needs down time to goof off and “be.”
- Remember that connection is the best prevention for adolescent acting out. Connect to your children through playful activities while they are still available on Saturday nights.
- Have some favourite games.

Feelings:

- Accept feelings as the unique expression of each family member.
- Separate feelings from chosen behaviour.
- Listen and respect feelings. Manage and negotiate chosen actions.
- Create a safe family environment for the expression of all feelings. No yelling or name calling allowed. Simply, “I feel hurt” or “I feel cheated off” and so on.

Communication:

- Send messages to all family members that you experience them as loveable and capable. Tell them how.
- Listen more than you talk. Do as Stephen Covey says “Seek first to understand the other.”
- Hold family meetings, if not weekly, then monthly to express appreciation, make family requests and solve family problems before they escalate.
- Catch health, goodness and virtues. Celebrate them. “I saw that!!! I like it when you lift your sister up so she can reach the apples.”
- Learn some sound discipline methods so that you can help your child develop self discipline rather than avoid naughty behaviour purely out of fear.
- Every day say “I love you.” We all forget that one so easily.

Spiritual Wellness

- Learn to ask some deep searching questions of yourself such as “Who am I?” “If I wasn’t a mother, father, spouse or manager who would I be?” “What is the meaning of my life?” “How can I lighten up and enjoy life?”
- Know what your goals are – for yourself, your family and your relationship with your children.

- Establish your personal and family values. Values and virtues provide the foundation to create healthy rules and boundaries. Decide what is most important to you whether it is religion, honesty, peace, compassion, nature or adventure. Act on your values.
- Develop a religious or spiritual practice that nurtures and guides your family.

Bottom Line Recommendation

Do what you can with what you know and what you have, and then let go of the rest. Guilt has the power to take away the benefits of any healthy moves you do make. Live light.

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