



The National Wellness Institute's

# SIX DIMENSIONS OF WELLNESS

Defining & Assessing Wellness

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A background image showing several hands of different skin tones gently cupping a small green seedling with soil. The image is partially obscured by a dark blue banner at the top.

# What is Wellness?

## What is WELLNESS?

Throughout time and across cultures, the term "wellness" has been defined and applied in many ways. The National Wellness Institute encapsulates these interpretations by acknowledging that:

- Wellness is a conscious, self-directed, and evolving process of achieving one's full potential.
- Wellness encompasses lifestyle, mental and spiritual well-being, and the environment.
- Wellness is positive, affirming, and contributes to living a long and healthy life.
- Wellness is multicultural and holistic, involving multiple dimensions.

Canadian-born author and physician Halbert L. Dunn, MD (1896–1975) was the leading figure in establishing a national vital statistics system in the United States and is known as the *"father of the wellness movement."* His work focused on the distinction between good health—not being ill—and what he termed "high-level wellness," which he defined as *"a condition of change in which the individual moves forward, climbing toward a higher potential of functioning."*

This simple yet profound explanation of wellness was embraced by the National Wellness Institute and led directly to the compelling definition of wellness we still use today:

**Wellness is functioning optimally  
within your current environment.**

## NWI's Six Dimensions of Wellness

Dr. Bill Hettler, co-founder of the National Wellness Institute, developed NWI's Six Dimensions of Wellness model in 1976. Today, this interdisciplinary model is recognized as the gold standard for promoting the interconnectedness of multiple dimensions, considers the range of personal factors influencing an individual's journey to optimal well-being, and is used by wellness leaders around the world to communicate about and drive innovative wellness initiatives. Along with the NWI Wellness Promotion Competency Model, it informs NWI's Certified Wellness Practitioner (CWP) credential and all NWI events, trainings, resources, tools, and advisory services.

While other models of wellness may highlight alternative dimensions, NWI's model includes these dimensions: Emotional, Physical, Intellectual, Occupational, Spiritual, and Social. What is important to remember is that wellness is multidimensional, all aspects of wellness are interrelated, and that people and place are co-dependent. Individuals who use the model or apply it in their professional work with others quickly become aware of the importance of focusing on multiple dimensions to achieve greater levels of fulfillment and to build a sense of holistic well-being.

NWI provides its "Six Dimensions of Wellness Self-assessment" to help individuals reflect on their wellness journey while assessing where they currently are within each dimension. Wellness is an active, intentional, and ongoing process; how one rates and responds today will be different from how they rate and respond in the future. We encourage individuals to use the tool when setting goals and building wellness plans. It is also a helpful resource to identify achievements, celebrate accomplishments, and analyze areas that require attention and improvement.



# Applying the Six Dimensions

## Applying the Six Dimensions of Wellness Model

Applying the Six Dimensions of Wellness model brings forth awareness of the interconnectedness of each dimension and how they contribute to living a healthy life. This holistic model explains:

- How one can develop and direct self-awareness, self-regulation, curiosity, and motivation.
- How one can develop their belief systems, identify their values, and create a strong worldview.
- How one benefits from regular physical activity, nutrition, strength, vitality, and self-care.
- How one can enrich life through work and recognize its connectedness to living and playing.
- How one can use creativity and stimulating mental activities to share their gifts with others.
- How one can enhance their environment by building better living spaces and social networks.
- How one can positively contribute to their environment and engage in their community.

NWI also developed three questions to help wellness professionals and organizations assess the degree to which they are successfully incorporating wellness into their strategies and initiatives:

- Q1: Does this help individuals achieve their full potential?
- Q2: Does this recognize and address multiple dimensions of wellness?
- Q3: Does this affirm and mobilize an individual's unique qualities and strengths?

Applying a multidimensional wellness approach that considers the **WHOLE PERSON** can be useful in nearly every human endeavor. As a pathway to optimal living, wellness is now being activated in a variety of associated fields, including health promotion, holistic health, clinical care, and multiple “helping professions,” including coaching, counseling, consulting, training, and instruction.

**Mindfully focusing on wellness builds resilience and enables individuals to thrive amidst life’s inevitable personal and professional challenges.**



When assessing the Six Dimensions of Wellness, keep in mind the potential impacts of key environmental factors where you **LIVE, WORK, LEARN, PLAY, and REFLECT**.

- **Dimension #1: EMOTIONAL WELLNESS**
- **Dimension #2: PHYSICAL WELLNESS**
- **Dimension #3: INTELLECTUAL WELLNESS**
- **Dimension #4: OCCUPATIONAL WELLNESS**
- **Dimension #5: SPIRITUAL WELLNESS**
- **Dimension #6: SOCIAL WELLNESS**

In addition, remember that improvements made in each individual dimension will likely result in changes to each of the other dimensions, too. Set your goals accordingly to maximize your results and reach your potential!

# Emotional Wellness

The awareness and acceptance of one's feelings and the capacity to manage behaviors related to one's emotional state.



## What is EMOTIONAL WELLNESS?

Emotional wellness recognizes the awareness and acceptance of one's feelings. It includes the degree to which one feels positive and enthusiastic about one's self and life, and the capacity to manage one's feelings and related behaviors, including the timely and realistic assessment of one's limitations. In this dimension, it is important to be aware of and accept one's own feelings, consider the feelings of others, develop autonomy, take an optimistic approach to life, and develop the ability to self-regulate in response to stress.

An emotionally well person maintains authentic, satisfying relationships with others. Awareness of, and accepting a wide range of feelings in one's self and in others is essential to wellness. On the wellness journey, this includes developing the capacity to recognize and manage feelings as they arise and communicate openly, honestly, and freely about the feelings being experienced.

Those who are well-developed in this dimension make their decisions based upon the synthesis of their collective feelings, thoughts, philosophies, and behaviors. They live and work independently while realizing the importance of seeking out and accepting the support and assistance of others. They build strong, interdependent relationships with others from a foundation of mutual respect, commitment, and trust. They willingly accept challenges, take risks, and recognize conflict as being potentially healthy. They manage their lives in personally rewarding ways and take responsibility for their actions. They see life as an exciting, fun, and hopeful adventure.

## Emotional Wellness follows these core tenets:

- It is better to be aware of and accept our feelings than to deny them.
- It is better to be optimistic in our approach to life than pessimistic.



# Emotional Wellness

The awareness and acceptance of one's feelings and the capacity to manage behaviors related to one's emotional state.

## Emotional Wellness Self-assessment

Considering where you are in your life right now, indicate your level of agreement with each statement listed below:

- 1 = Almost Never
- 2 = Rarely
- 3 = Sometimes
- 4 = Often
- 5 = Almost Always



**Recognizing both my strengths and my weaknesses, I love and accept myself as I am.**

- My agreement score = \_\_\_\_\_

**When experiencing strong emotions, I have the ability to express how I am feeling.**

- My agreement score = \_\_\_\_\_

**In the midst of life's challenges, I am able to focus on the positive aspects of the situation.**

- My agreement score = \_\_\_\_\_

**I proactively seek help and support from others when experiencing difficulties.**

- My agreement score = \_\_\_\_\_

**I regularly engage in mindfulness practices and stress-reduction activities.**

- My agreement score = \_\_\_\_\_

**I intentionally practice gratitude every day.**

- My agreement score = \_\_\_\_\_

**On a scale of 1 (low) and 10 (high), how would you rate your overall satisfaction with where you are in this dimension? \_\_\_\_\_**

Personal Notes & Reflections:

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# Physical Wellness

The consistent prioritization of physical self-care and the engagement in a variety of health-enriching behaviors.



## What is PHYSICAL WELLNESS?

Physical wellness recognizes the consistent prioritization of physical self-care and the engagement in a variety of health-enriching behaviors. As human beings, we require regular physical activity to maintain a healthy, active, and well-balanced lifestyle. Individuals are encouraged to stay physically fit, consume nutritious foods, establish healthy sleep patterns, prioritize rest and relaxation, and seek out appropriate care from trusted medical and wellness professionals when necessary.

While development in this dimension encourages learning about exercise, physical fitness, diet and nutrition, and the importance of rest, it also discourages the use of tobacco, vaping products, and drugs, along with the excessive consumption of alcoholic beverages. Functioning optimally in one's current environment requires careful analysis of the many factors associated with physical health and the implementation of a comprehensive well-being plan.

Those who are well-developed in this dimension take personal responsibility for the health of their body, are proactive in the treatment of minor illnesses, and value the role of health and wellness professionals in their lives. They regularly monitor their own vital signs and learn to recognize their body's warning signals. They understand and appreciate the relationship between sound nutrition and how the body performs. They appreciate the physical benefits of looking good and feeling strong, and recognize the array of associated psychological benefits that come with maintaining and prioritizing their health, including enhanced levels of personal self-awareness, self-regulation, motivation, and general happiness.

### Physical Wellness follows these core tenets:

- It is better to consume foods and beverages that enhance good health rather than those which impair or work against it.
- It is better to feel strong, be physically fit, and be well-rested than out of shape and tired.

# Physical Wellness

The prioritization of physical self-care and engagement in a variety of health-enriching behaviors.

## Physical Wellness Self-assessment

Considering where you are in your life right now, indicate your level of agreement with each statement listed below:

- 1 = Almost Never
- 2 = Rarely
- 3 = Sometimes
- 4 = Often
- 5 = Almost Always



**I engage in physical activity every day.**

- My agreement score = \_\_\_\_\_

**I consume nutritious foods (fruits, vegetables, lean protein) daily.**

- My agreement score = \_\_\_\_\_

**In general, I rest soundly and wake up feeling refreshed.**

- My agreement score = \_\_\_\_\_

**I refrain from smoking (tobacco, vape, marijuana) and using prohibited drugs.**

- My agreement score = \_\_\_\_\_

**I refrain from overconsuming alcoholic beverages.**

- My agreement score = \_\_\_\_\_

**I prioritize my physical health by seeking out appropriate medical care when necessary.**

- My agreement score = \_\_\_\_\_

**On a scale of 1 (low) and 10 (high), how would you rate your overall satisfaction with where you are in this dimension? \_\_\_\_\_**

Personal Notes & Reflections:

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# Intellectual Wellness

The creative, stimulating activities that lead to learning, personal growth, and the sharing of one's unique gifts with others.



## What is INTELLECTUAL WELLNESS?

Intellectual wellness brings awareness to the creative, stimulating activities that lead to learning, personal growth, and the sharing of one's unique gifts with others. It involves being curious about, committed to, and actively engaged in life-long learning. In this dimension, it is important to stretch one's thinking, challenge one's mind with a variety of mental and creative pursuits, learn from one's experiences, identify and address problems, and choose appropriate courses of action after careful analysis and based on available information.

The well person expands their knowledge and skills while developing opportunities to share their unique gifts and talents with others. Pulling from a wide array of educational, academic, cultural, and community resources, those focused on improvement and growth in this dimension will both seek out and cherish a variety of stimulating intellectual growth opportunities.

Those who are well-developed in this dimension explore their potential for creativity, advance their problem-solving skills, and prioritize learning. They spend time pursuing personal hobbies, develop new interests, read books and magazines, stay abreast of current issues, explore new ideas, and are inspired by different ways of doing things. Through the application and development of intellectual curiosity, these individuals strive to expand and challenge their minds with a wide array of creative, thoughtful, and intellectual endeavors. They are willing to try new things, make mistakes, and use their learning as a way to make the world a better place for all.

## Intellectual Wellness follows these core tenets:

- It is better to stretch and challenge one's mind with intellectual and creative pursuits than to become self-satisfied and unproductive.
- It is better to identify potential problems and choose appropriate courses of action based on available information than to wait, worry, and contend with major concerns later.

# Intellectual Wellness

The creative, stimulating activities that lead to learning, personal growth, and the sharing of one's unique gifts with others.

## Intellectual Wellness Self-assessment

Considering where you are in your life right now, indicate your level of agreement with each statement listed below:

- 1 = Almost Never
- 2 = Rarely
- 3 = Sometimes
- 4 = Often
- 5 = Almost Always



**I am inspired to explore a variety of stimulating, innovative, and creative activities.**

- My agreement score = \_\_\_\_\_

**I regularly engage in interesting and stimulating learning opportunities.**

- My agreement score = \_\_\_\_\_

**I willingly acknowledge my own errors and see them as opportunities to learn and grow.**

- My agreement score = \_\_\_\_\_

**I use trusted resources to stay informed about local, regional, national, and world events.**

- My agreement score = \_\_\_\_\_

**I regularly immerse myself in intellectual pursuits with energy, focus, and genuine interest.**

- My agreement score = \_\_\_\_\_

**I take regular breaks and am committed to relaxation as a way to recharge my brain.**

- My agreement score = \_\_\_\_\_

**On a scale of 1 (low) and 10 (high), how would you rate your overall satisfaction with where you are in this dimension?** \_\_\_\_\_

Personal Notes & Reflections:

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# Occupational Wellness

The personal satisfaction and enrichment one receives in life through their employment, academic, or volunteer work.



## What is OCCUPATIONAL WELLNESS?

Occupational wellness recognizes the personal satisfaction and enrichment one receives through their employment, academic, and/or volunteer and community engagement activities.

In this dimension, it is important to seek out opportunities that are in direct alignment with one's values, interests, beliefs, and passions. Individuals are encouraged to develop interchangeable skills through a wide array of connection, networking, and engagement opportunities.

At the center of occupational wellness is the premise that occupational development is directly related to and impacted by one's attitude about their work. Pursuing interests that are meaningful and important leads to satisfaction, both short- and long-term, and contributes to improved levels of confidence and self-worth, and feelings of contributing to the greater good.

Those who are well-developed in this dimension willingly contribute their unique gifts, skills, and talents to the work they find personally meaningful and professionally rewarding. They convey their values and beliefs through their involvement in activities that are gratifying and rewarding, and that align with their best interests. They are willing to explore and entertain new opportunities as they arise if those opportunities help them advance their position and support their goals. They engage in work that meets their overall life objectives, aligns with their personal interests, elevates their professional ambitions, drives performance, and provides ongoing satisfaction.

## Occupational Wellness follows these core tenets:

- It is better to choose work that is consistent with one's personal values, interests, and beliefs than to select work that is unpleasant or unrewarding.
- It is better to develop functional, transferable skills through structured involvement opportunities than to remain inactive and uninvolved.



# Occupational Wellness

The personal satisfaction and enrichment one receives in life through their employment, academic, or volunteer work.

## Occupational Wellness Self-assessment

Considering where you are in your life right now, indicate your level of agreement with each statement listed below:

- 1 = Almost Never
- 2 = Rarely
- 3 = Sometimes
- 4 = Often
- 5 = Almost Always



**My professional, academic, and/or volunteer pursuits reflect my personal values.**

- My agreement score = \_\_\_\_\_

**I believe that the work I do accomplishes something important.**

- My agreement score = \_\_\_\_\_

**I regularly have opportunities to make meaningful contributions where I work.**

- My agreement score = \_\_\_\_\_

**My choice of work includes a variety of challenges that I can manage with my current skills.**

- My agreement score = \_\_\_\_\_

**I feel that I have a good life-work balance.**

- My agreement score = \_\_\_\_\_

**I authentically enjoy the work I do.**

- My agreement score = \_\_\_\_\_

**On a scale of 1 (low) and 10 (high), how would you rate your overall satisfaction with where you are in this dimension? \_\_\_\_\_**

Personal Notes & Reflections:

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# Spiritual Wellness

The development of an appreciation for the depth and expanse of life and natural forces that exist in the universe.



## What is SPIRITUAL WELLNESS?

Spiritual wellness recognizes the development of an appreciation for the depth and expanse of life and the natural forces that exist in the universe. It reflects one's search for meaning and purpose, and the value of human existence.

In this dimension, it is important to ponder one's purpose, to be open to the ideologies of others, and to live each day in a way that is consistent with one's values and beliefs. An individual's personal and deliberate search for meaning and purpose will be characterized by a peaceful harmony between their feelings, emotions, and the rough and rugged stretches of their spiritual wellness journey.

While on the journey of exploring available spiritual tenets, an individual may encounter feelings of curiosity, pleasure, joy, comfort, bliss, and happiness, while simultaneously recognizing feelings of fear, doubt, confusion, concern, despair, disappointment, and even dislocation. This is normal and natural since these feelings and emotions are all important components to one's exploration of spirituality and will ultimately be displayed in the value system they choose to adopt to bring meaning and purpose to their personal existence.

Those who are well-developed in this dimension are confident in their chosen beliefs, honor the choices of others, seek understanding, and recognize the multicultural nature of our planet. Their actions are consistently in alignment with their values, and they have a strong "worldview."

## Spiritual Wellness follows these core tenets:

- It is better to ponder the meaning of life for ourselves and to be open to the beliefs of others than to close our minds and become intolerant.
- It is better to live each day in a way that is consistent with one's personal values and beliefs than to do otherwise, compromise our integrity, and feel untrue to ourselves.

# Spiritual Wellness

The development of an appreciation for the depth and  
expanse of life and natural forces that exist in the universe.

## Spiritual Wellness Self-assessment

Considering where you are in your life right now, indicate your level of agreement with each statement listed below:

- 1 = Almost Never
- 2 = Rarely
- 3 = Sometimes
- 4 = Often
- 5 = Almost Always



**I feel that my life has a sense of direction or meaning to it.**

- My agreement score = \_\_\_\_\_

**I have a sense of peace about my life and my place in the world.**

- My agreement score = \_\_\_\_\_

**I accept events and others as they are and do not make judgments.**

- My agreement score = \_\_\_\_\_

**I feel a sense of connectedness with all other living things.**

- My agreement score = \_\_\_\_\_

**Prayer and/or meditation are a regular part of my daily routine.**

- My agreement score = \_\_\_\_\_

**I live each day in a way that is consistent with my values.**

- My agreement score = \_\_\_\_\_

**On a scale of 1 (low) and 10 (high), how would you rate your overall satisfaction with where you are in this dimension?** \_\_\_\_\_

Personal Notes & Reflections:

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# Social Wellness

The contribution to one's environment and community with an emphasis on the interdependence between others and nature.



## What is SOCIAL WELLNESS?

Social wellness recognizes contribution to one's environment and community with an emphasis on the interdependence between others and nature. It includes contributing to the common welfare of one's community, thinking of others, maintaining awareness of one's importance in society, as well as the impact one has on multiple environments.

In this dimension, it is important to live in harmony with others and maintain a healthy respect for the environment. Individuals are encouraged to make a positive impact by connecting with others while activating wellness where they LIVE, WORK, LEARN, PLAY, and REFLECT. These are the five pillars of one's environment as reflected in NWI's Social Activation of Wellness model:

Those who are well-developed in this dimension take an active interest in improving the world by encouraging healthier living, initiating improved communications with those around them, and finding ways to connect to and learn more about people and nature. They seek out ways to preserve the beauty of the natural world. They understand the power of making conscious choices that further enhance personal relationships, important friendships, and essential professional connections. They strive to build exceptional living spaces and elevate what it means to be part of a community.



## Social Wellness follows these core tenets:

- It is better to contribute to the common welfare than to think only of ourselves.
- It is better to live in harmony with others and our environment than to live in conflict with them.

# Social Wellness

The contribution to one's environment and community with an emphasis on the interdependence between others and nature.

## Social Wellness Self-assessment

Considering where you are in your life right now, indicate your level of agreement with each statement listed below:

- 1 = Almost Never
- 2 = Rarely
- 3 = Sometimes
- 4 = Often
- 5 = Almost Always



**I enjoy creating or participating in opportunities that contribute to a greater cause.**

- My agreement score = \_\_\_\_\_

**I regularly use my talents, skills, strengths, and natural gifts to help others in need.**

- My agreement score = \_\_\_\_\_

**I have safe, loving, supportive, and nurturing relationships in all areas of my life.**

- My agreement score = \_\_\_\_\_

**I protect and conserve natural resources to ensure a healthy environment for all organisms.**

- My agreement score = \_\_\_\_\_

**I am aware of and work to help resolve environmental issues in my community.**

- My agreement score = \_\_\_\_\_

**I feel connected to others and seek out new opportunities for social engagement.**

- My agreement score = \_\_\_\_\_

**On a scale of 1 (low) and 10 (high), how would you rate your overall satisfaction with where you are in this dimension?** \_\_\_\_\_

Personal Notes & Reflections:

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# A Gold-standard Model of Multidimensional Wellness

The National Wellness Institute has built a global reputation as the leading authority in elevating wellness professionals to help individuals from all walks of life achieve greater levels of health and well-being where they live, work, learn, play, and reflect.

Since our inception in 1977, we have stayed true to our roots and our definition of wellness:

*“Wellness is functioning optimally within the current environment.”*



NWI's Six Dimensions of Wellness model is the international gold standard for improving personal wellness and is a trusted resource for professional wellness leaders, Certified Wellness Practitioners, clinicians, coaches, educators, and more to elevate the well-being of the individuals they serve.

We invite you to utilize the Six Dimensions of Wellness model and Self-assessment tool to activate wellness and make a positive, long-lasting impact on the world. We acknowledge the existence of other multidimensional models and encourage you to both expand your thinking and widen your lens of what wellness means, whatever model you embrace. When it comes to maximizing the journey of wellness, the National Wellness Institute will be by your side every step of the way!

