

[IMAGE]

Understanding Wellness

And How Your Chiropractor Can Help You Achieve It

By Dr. Claudia Anrig

Many have attributed the term *wellness* to Dr. Halbert Dumn, who wrote a booklet in 1961 titled *High-Level Wellness*, in which he basically defined it as a lifestyle approach for pursuing elevated states of physical and psychological well-being. While the reality is that the term *wellness* was actually coined in the year 1654 by a Scottish physician, the true meaning has evolved beyond what they both intended.

Defining Wellness

Chiropractors are the originators of the wellness movement, being the only health care professionals who recognize the body's natural ability to heal itself. This is why they have spent more than 50 years educating their patients on the benefits of a wellness lifestyle. Proper nutrition, exercise and routine chiropractic care help the body to perform at maximum efficiency, resulting in improved function.

Wellness: Improving Function

The term *improved function* has been used by chiropractors for years to help patients understand the benefits of chiropractic care and the role it plays in true wellness. The body is made up of muscles, organs and glands that are controlled by the nervous system, and the nervous system consists of the brain, spinal cord and nerves.

Understanding Wellness - Copyright © Stock Photo / Register Mark The brain sends signals down the spine and to the nerves, which tell the heart to beat, the lungs to breathe, the stomach to digest, the glands to produce necessary hormones, and so on. It's when the signals don't get from the spinal cord to the nerves and then from the nerves to the muscles, organs and glands that the body begins to lose proper function and symptoms begin to occur.

Mainstream medicine doesn't recognize these symptoms as simple alerts from the body that there's something amiss, but instead as something that must be eliminated through chemicals or pharmaceuticals.

They don't seek wellness, but rather a lack of symptoms.

Medical vs. Wellness Care

The biggest difference between mainstream medicine and wellness care is just that: medicine. Today's medical professionals are still treating symptoms instead of the cause of the problem. The bigger problem lies with the fact that the medicines usually begin to create their own list of symptoms that must be treated with more medicines. It's a domino effect leading not to health and wellness, but to illness and dependence.

By focusing on symptoms instead of body function, they avoid having to look at the root cause and can ignore the lifestyle habits or outside influences that are the underlying problem. A drug-induced lack of symptoms leads to a false sense of security and avoids the lifestyle changes truly necessary for wellness.

On the other hand, the wellness chiropractic practitioner recognizes that the symptoms are there for a reason, an alert from your body that something isn't right, and begins to seek the *cause* of the problem.

How Stressors Affect Wellness

What you may not realize is that your body is constantly adapting; when something isn't quite right, the body will try to compensate. Physical, emotional and chemical stressors, or as they are called by chiropractors, *the three T's* (traumas, thoughts and toxins), begin to cause the body to try to balance itself out or acclimate to the stress. Problems arise when the body, in a constant state of instability, begins to wear down; this is when our wellness or well-being is compromised.

The more obvious examples of stressors are physical; falls, jolts or sudden impacts to the spine. However, even micro-traumas caused by improper posture or one-sided repetitive movements can stress our system.

Emotional stressors are more difficult to avoid, but can be equally damaging to our wellness. Some well-known effects of emotional stress include increased blood pressure and gastrointestinal difficulties. But consider for a moment the pressure put on the spine by the physiological response to stress. Emotional stress can cause the muscles of the neck and back to tighten in response, potentially affecting the alignment of the spine.

Finally, chemical stressors or toxins are one of the leading causes of distress to the nervous system and interference to wellness, with diet and nutrition as one of the most frequently discussed underlying factors.

From the chemicals in sodas and energy drinks to processed foods and preservatives, our body is constantly adapting to a chemical attack, working overtime to remove toxins and chemicals in an attempt to maintain balance.

Finding True Wellness

These days, the term *wellness* is being overused and abused by a society that recognizes its importance but doesn't understand its application. Marketing departments around the globe are throwing the word around because it's popular, but often it's simply being used as a gimmick to improve sales of products that have nothing to do with improved health and function.

True wellness is achieved when all of the body's systems are receiving their signals from the brain and are properly providing the body with what it needs to not only survive, but thrive. Too often, we mistake an absence of symptoms as the presence of health, when the reality is that the two are not even related.

We live in a society that's been conditioned to believe there's a medication or a surgical procedure to fix every problem. Is that really the way you want to live your life? Now that you understand wellness, start doing something to ensure you can enjoy it. Talk to your chiropractor to learn more.

What Wellness Is (and Isn't)

What is *wellness*? Many people think the absence of symptomatic disease means they are "well," but true wellness is actually quite different. If you're sick, and you take medication to mask the symptoms, it doesn't mean you get well; it just means the symptoms go away (at least temporarily). The root cause of the problem hasn't been addressed, and you may be no better off than when you started.

For example, do you have high cholesterol or know someone who does? If you're taking medication to regulate your cholesterol, it may work, but it won't address why you have high cholesterol in the first place. In many cases, it may be poor diet or lack of exercise. I think we can all agree that a person with high cholesterol, poor diet and a sedentary lifestyle who has to take medication is definitely *not* achieving a state of wellness.

lady with fruits - Copyright © Stock Photo / Register Mark **Wellness: Part Health Promotion, Part Disease Prevention**

Think of wellness in terms of promoting better health and preventing disease. In that context, you don't wait until symptoms appear - back pain, a stomach ulcer, fatigue, shortness of breath, etc. - or a disease process takes hold (diabetes, cardiovascular disease, cancer) and then react; you proactively engage in behaviors that promote optimal health and reduce your risk of developing disease in the first place. Chiropractic adjustments, smoking cessation, a healthy, balanced diet, regular physical activity, and stress reduction tactics are among the many lifestyle modifications that can promote health, prevent disease and contribute to lifelong wellness.

Top Five Truths About Wellness Care

5. Symptoms are not the problem, but an alert to an underlying cause and should be heeded, not silenced with chemicals.
 4. The body has an inborn ability to restore itself and will adapt to outside stressors, whether they are physical, emotional or chemical. When these stressors become too much, the body will eventually wear itself down trying to maintain balance; this results in an absence of health and wellness.
 3. Wellness practitioners do not diagnose or treat conditions and diseases, but instead identify and remove outside stressors.
 2. Wellness care focuses on improving function rather than hiding symptoms.
 1. Doctors of chiropractic recognize the value of preventative care compared to symptom-based care. With regular adjustments, spinal health is maintained, encouraging proper nervous system function and allowing for the body to perform at its best.
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