

Finding Balance

Last month in the final article "Parents Take Charge" we touched upon the importance of balance in our life. The first step in achieving balance is taking responsibility for our own wellbeing. Once we accept responsibility for our wellbeing we must then recognize the dynamic components of wellness that constitute optimum holistic health - holistic meaning the whole is greater than the sum of its parts. The second step is to become aware of the components, how they affect us and play a part in our life. The third step is discovering the tools to optimize each component, as a result optimizing your health, managing and reducing everyday stressors and ultimately being whole.

There are different thoughts on how many components of wellness constitute optimum holistic health. For the sake of this article and our search for complete wellness we are going to review all that we believe are important. Each component is interconnected and part of our whole being and must be in balance to create a life of optimum holistic health. Ghandi said "you can not do wrong in one area of your life and do right in the other areas".

The eight components of wellness are: spiritual, intellectual, emotional, physical, social, vocational/occupational, cultural and environmental. Please visit the University of Miami's website at <http://wellness.med.miami.edu/x80.xml#> for a complete review of the eight components.

Spiritual – Our beliefs, values and how they provide meaning in our lives; when we become still and quiet our minds of thought, we come into the present moment (through breath, prayer or meditation) we can more easily tap into our intuition, our higher level of consciousness, our higher power, our God; we can strive for seeing our vision of God in all things and realize we are all one in God.

Intellectual – The desire to learn and use information effectively; the ability to create, think critically, problem solve, reflect upon experiences, be open minded and share knowledge and experience with others

Emotional – The ability to weather the storm, go with the flow and manage the stressors that life brings; having self awareness and accepting yourself and others; having the capacity to constructively express emotions to others and have healthy relationships

Physical – The ability to meet the demands of daily tasks; respecting your body by taking care of it through physical activity, proper nutrition, maintaining a healthy weight, getting enough sleep, healthy sexuality, being proactive in your medical care and avoiding the use of drugs, smoking and excessive alcohol use

Social – The ability to successfully be involved, communicate and have healthy interdependent relationships with others in ones community; the ability to be empathetic and care for others and have others care for you

Vocational/Occupational – Ideally finding where your values and passion meet who you are and what you do; contributing positively to the community to better it as well as being personally rewarded and challenged; finding balance between work and leisure

Cultural – Learning about, understanding and accepting the diversity of other faiths, traditions and cultural backgrounds; being civil, tolerant, respectful and sensitive towards your own beliefs and others

Environmental – Having awareness and respect for our physical environment; taking an active role in promoting environmental wellness which improves the standard of living and contributes to the quality of our air, food and water; becoming educated on the condition of our environment and the role we play in maximizing harmony and reducing harm to it; protecting the earth in which we inhabit.

Balancing these eight dynamic components is a lifelong process. They are not static but are constantly changing. The dance is about being aware of each, how they affect you and how you may be reacting to them. We explore, experience and learn through all of the components. We can choose to grow and evolve through them or we can get stuck. Growth is imperative for discovering who you are. In Journey into Power Baron Baptiste states "If I don't grow, the people I work with suffer. In a sense, if I don't grow, the world suffers, because we are all interconnected and impact one another in

powerful ways. We have two choices: We grow, or we die. It's that simple. Growth is forward movement; anything else is stagnation or, worse, regression."

All of the components of wellness are interconnected and at the core they have the same common denominator. It is self, our being. Being true to what you see is the surest way to balance. Finding holistic balance comes from one main source, love. It is a common love and respect for all aspects of life. Love is the most powerful energy we possess and once we discover complete love of self we discover that just as the components are interconnected so are we to one another and all that surrounds us.

I know through experience that to love myself is the root for being able to sustain the balancing dance of the components. It takes commitment and consistency. For example it takes commitment and consistency to get results from an exercise program. We don't always feel like exercising, we don't always like to and sometimes we don't. But the more we do it, the more ingrained it becomes in our life, the more we know we need it and the more we know at all levels of our being that it is good for our health and wellbeing.

Like exercise, loving yourself takes commitment and consistency. The more love you have for yourself the less likely you are to be self destructive physically and emotionally. This carries over into relationships with others. When you love yourself, you are more likely to be accepting of others, understanding, compassionate, empathetic, generous and open, as well as with your community and the environment in which you inhabit. You begin to respect your body, your health, others and your environment more. You begin to understand that everything you do affects you and has a ripple effect to everyone and everything around you. Love is what will save you, your relationships, our communities and our environment.

Okay, so it isn't easy to look in the mirror and fall in love, for we all have our story. We instantly think of reasons why we should be hard on ourselves and more critical. In the long run, this will only continue to break you, not help you break through. What we focus on we create. What we water we grow. As in the Internet movie "The Secret", we discover the truth of "Newton's Law of Attraction", the most powerful law in the universe: what you focus on is what you attract, positive or negative. Through positive thought, pure intent, affirmations on what you want and who you want to be, you shape and create your reality. Be positive, be in love with yourself or at least, act as if or fake it 'till you make it because you will ultimately attract and achieve it.

Just like exercise, make a commitment to self-love and make it consistent. Every minute that you love yourself more is one that you aren't being critical and judgmental to yourself or others. Love you for you - all of you. To be loved we must also love others for who they are. You may not like them or the traits they possess and vice versa but they are who they are and you are who you are, not good not bad, just are. The true steps in the dance are acceptance and the golden rule, "do unto others as you would have them do unto you."

How do we achieve balance and love? I have found it through Yoga, meditation, pure intent and positive affirmations, the study of chakras and the through my relationships with those around me.

Yoga is about awakening the mind, body and spirit. It teaches us to be aware, discover our truth, our authentic self, to create space in our lives, live in the now, be in the present moment. It is the practice of self acceptance, being able to accept the things we may not like about ourselves and therefore being able to release them. Donald Walsh presents in Conversations with God that discovering who you are not is a very powerful way we discover who we truly are. Being able to go with the flow and weather the storm is the greatest key to stress reduction.

Next month we will discover the power of yoga, meditation with pure intent, positive affirmations and the healing power of chakras.

The author of this article is Kiersten K. Mooney. Kiersten has a degree in Sociology, Exercise Sports Science and Sports Medicine from the University of Miami. She also attended many graduate courses in Exercise Physiology and Nutrition. As a graduate she has done extensive research in the field of sports specific training and has been published. She is a certified personal trainer, aerobics instructor and yoga instructor. Currently, she is studying eating disorders and the growing epidemic of obesity in the United States, with a focus on childhood obesity.