



## What Does Well-being Mean to You?

*A sense of well-being is often used to describe physical and emotional health. But how do you measure well-being, particularly its intangible aspects? You may feel mostly contented with your life, dissatisfied with certain parts, or that you need a major overhaul to be happy and healthy.*

To better prioritize changes you may want to make to achieve and sustain well-being, it helps to understand the concept and how it applies to you.

### Well-being Defined

While there is not a consensus around a single definition, there is general agreement that well-being involves:

- Positive emotions and moods (e.g., contentment, joy)
- Absence of negative emotions (e.g., depression, anxiety, anger)
- Life satisfaction, fulfillment and positive functioning
- Feeling physically healthy and energetic

Well-being is used by public health professionals as a barometer to measure how people perceive their ability to thrive. This includes meeting fundamental needs such as shelter, food, health care, education and employment, according to researchers at the [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#). More difficult to assess, but equally as important, are factors such as the quality of relationships, resilience and coping mechanisms, and realization of potential.

The global research firm Gallup did a large-scale well-being survey in more than 150 countries. The primary objective was to determine how people envision their “best possible future.” Across all cultures and belief systems, Gallup identified five universal, interconnected elements that comprise well-being:

1. **Career:** How you occupy your time or like what you do every day
2. **Social:** Having strong relationships and love in your life
3. **Financial:** How effectively you manage your economic situation
4. **Physical:** Having good health and enough energy to get things done on a daily basis
5. **Community:** The feeling of engagement you have in the area where you live

Although these five elements are consistent, people take different paths to get the same outcome. For example, faith in a higher power, pursuit of a meaningful cause or a strong desire to help others may be an individual's underlying guiding force.



### What's Important to You?

Tom Rath and Jim Harter, Ph.D., who co-wrote the best-selling book *Well-being: The Five Essential Elements*, suggest in a Gallup [workplace essay](#) that incremental changes can be achieved in all five categories. On the other hand, they warn, you are likely to be the "single biggest threat to your own well-being," largely because of the human tendency to let short-term desires or decisions (instant gratification) override what's best to ensure long-term life satisfaction.

They say that one way to address this tendency is to be more aware of the balance between short-term incentives and your long-term objectives. For example, you want to lose weight. You can choose a salad or a cheeseburger and fries for lunch. Your goal is to lose 50 pounds, but in the moment you don't want to feel sleepy and sluggish all afternoon.

### Well-being Tips

U.S. Preventive Medicine, a population health management company that specializes in wellness programs, has introduced a four-week *Fall into Well-Being Challenge* for October as part of its Healthy Habits programming for enrollees, including WorkCare employees. The challenge involves:

**Week 1 - Meditation:** Find a quiet place to relax your mind and body, focus on your breath, and let thoughts come and go without judgment. Meditation helps you manage a busy mind, relieve anxiety and recharge your mental well-being.

**Week 2 – Relationships:** Invite a friend or family member to pursue a hobby, join a community group or ask someone to join you for a walk. Write or call your children, parents or partner to tell them how much they mean to you. Healthy relationships help you cope with stress and adversity.

**Week 3 – Sleep:** Be consistent with your bedtime routine. Before sleep, avoid stimulants, including caffeinated beverages and electronic devices. If your thoughts race, keep a notebook nearby and write them down so you can review them later. Sleep improves productivity, concentration and memory, and it helps reduce your risk of accidents and health problems.

**Week 4 – Exercise:** Get at least 30 minutes of physical activity a day. It may be just walking or rigorous aerobic exercise. Gently stretch before exercising and throughout the day. Consider taking yoga or tai-chi to improve your mind-body connection. Exercise helps stimulate "feel-good" chemicals in your body, boosts your energy level and improves self-esteem.

Finally, if you devote some time to identifying your life priorities and developing interpersonal skills to successfully interact and communicate with others, experts say you will find it's easier to navigate passages leading to a deep and long-lasting sense of well-being.