

# Swellness

(Yes, it is spelled correctly)

**Health. Strength. Tenacity. Flexibility. Durability. Resilience. Power. Discipline. Vigor.**

These words can be used to describe both mental and physical characteristics. Swellness is the idea that our physical and mental well-being cannot be separated; they are dependent upon each other. It is the belief that we must take care of our mind to take care of our body, and we need to take care of our body to take care of our mind; that health is psychosomatic / somapsychotic and that those words can be applied to wellness as well as to illness. Swellness exists in those who have overcome illnesses and physical setbacks with powerful positive beliefs about their ability to survive and thrive. Swellness is not a goal, it is a continuous process.

## From the dictionary:

**Swell** – noun: a full shape or form   adverb: excellently; very well

**Swellness** - is a state of excellently full form.



## A few considerations for healthy minds and healthy bodies:

- When our minds are in turmoil, often our guts and/or our muscles are, too.
- When our neck and shoulders ache from stress, we may struggle to feel happy or optimistic.

**We need:** Strength in our heart, character, muscles, mind

Fresh: air; water, foods, ideas

Connections to others, to nature, to our authentic selves

## Important Considerations for PHYSICAL HEALTH

**Air. Water. Food. Movement. Attitude.**

**Air:** Oxygen allows our cells to produce energy from the food we eat. It is needed to keep cells alive. Being able to move and think require oxygen. And breathing deeply is a great stress reliever by decreasing heart rate, blood pressure and muscle tension.

**Water:** About 60% of the human body is water! According to the US Geological Survey, water serves a number of functions including:

- Water is a vital nutrient to the life of every cell.
- The carbohydrates and proteins that our bodies use as food are metabolized and transported by water in the bloodstream.
- Water assists in flushing waste and toxins, mainly through urination.
- Water acts as a shock absorber for the brain and spinal cord.
- Water forms saliva, keeps our eyes moist and lubricates our joints
- Water regulates our internal body temperature by sweating and respiration.

**Food:** Growing food is not easy. When we harvest our lettuce, rhubarb, pears, etc., we find it not only provides nourishment, but also connects us in gratitude to the farmers and farm-workers who keep us alive. Eating healthy food makes us more productive, reduces stress, boosts happiness, controls weight gain, saves money (including medical expenses), helps to prevent disease, and increases energy. Cooking meals from scratch increases our connection to the earth, to the people who grow our food, and to each other...all important psychological aspects for belonging. Food for thought!

**Movement:** Our body is built to move: our muscles, our lungs, our organs (including our brain!), our heart, our bones and more conspire to provide the air, water and nutrients to keep our complex system working. Movement supports increased strength, better sleep, and improved mental and physical health.

**Attitude:** Add a healthy attitude to good nutrition and you have a recipe for better health and a longer life.

A University of Illinois (UI) study found that "anxiety, depression, a lack of enjoyment of daily activities and pessimism all are associated with higher rates of disease and a shorter lifespan." UI professor emeritus of psychology Ed Diener added, "Current health recommendations focus on four things: avoid obesity, eat right, exercise and don't smoke, but it may be time to add 'be happy and avoid chronic anger and depression' to the list."

# Important Considerations for MENTAL HEALTH

## Security. Belonging. Autonomy. Purpose. Meaning.

**Security:** safety / having our needs met / enough money / warm and out of the elements. We are barraged with stories of terrible and depressing events in the news. When we have the choice to seek out information, we still choose to focus on bad, scary and negative stories. We worry about the security of our job, our health, our home, our children, our plans for the future. Security issues may also include staying in an unhealthy relationship/situation because it is known and 'normal', even though it may be disrespectful and painful. The unknown may be scarier. Fear of failing and rejection can be paralyzing. The physical and mental stress from elevated levels of fear and worry can cause us to feel weak, sick, overwhelmed, untrusting, depressed, disconnected. We may seek medication to reduce worry and anxiety (which may then cause us to feel more vulnerable and dependent).

**Belonging:** acceptance / relationships / respect / understanding. A basic human need is to belong to a group, a family, a community. We have a deep desire to feel we are valuable to society and can be acknowledged and accepted for who we are. We can 'charge our batteries' when we engaging with others by playing a game, volunteering, talking, preparing a meal, working on a project or simply sharing time together. In person. (The internet creates and maintains connections, but they cannot replace live interaction.) Healthy relationships require respect: so give it and get it. Or go.

**Autonomy:** agency / power / freedom. It is important to feel we are in control of our destiny and capable to do things for ourselves. (We are generally far more capable than we tend to believe we are.) We need to feel we are valuable and offer something unique. A belief in agency or self-efficacy plays a crucial role in physical health and well-being. We have the power to say 'no' and create clear boundaries. We have the power to say 'yes' and make lasting commitments. We can learn new things. We can get physically invigorated by exercising our power. Acknowledging and exercising our power enhances healing and supports physical and mental health.

**Purpose:** The 'meaning of life', the 'reason for living', one's 'driving force'. What you set out to accomplish or attain. Determined intention. Aim. What do you enjoy the most about being alive? Feeling alive (often not consciously...simply 'in the flow'), and spending time making the most of our short life, is important to our health!

**Meaning:** sense of purpose / hope / belief / spirituality / morality. Regardless of how we were raised, we each possess a truth that is unique to us. We have our own set of beliefs, our own way of making sense of the world, and an individualized system for how to respond to challenges. We feel hope if we wish to and can plan for a future that we believe we can create. We are the captains of our ships and we decide where we are going and why. Meaning is how we make sense of our existence, which contributes to our health and well-being. To live without meaning incites suffering. Viktor Frankl believed that a firm sense of meaning is essential for optimal human development.

## Some ways we can become weak or ill:

Consider things that deplete your mental and physical strength.

Eating unhealthy food / unhealthy amounts of food  
Not drinking enough water  
Giving up, despair, feeling defeated  
Mental and physical exhaustion  
Saying 'yes' when we want to say 'no'  
Blaming

Letting negativity dominate our thoughts  
Cheating, lying, trying to manipulate others  
Lack of exercise and fresh air  
Addictions: drugs, alcohol, gambling, food,  
unhealthy relationships, TV/internet  
Feeling disconnected from nature and the world

## Personal Litmus Test:

When you feel pressed to make a decision, consider asking yourself:

- Does this strengthen me? Or is it a counterfeit to strength?
- Is it aligned with my goals? My values? My well-being?
- Does this strengthen my community as a whole or just a faction / fraction?
- Does this respect all things? And elements shared by all things (such as water, earth, air)?
- Does this impede anyone's travel on their own path to self-actualization or well-being?
- Then second-guess yourself and play 'Devil's Advocate'!

## Very small note on Embodied Cognition:

Find out whatever you can about it! It is the study of mind/body integration that goes way beyond Well-being.

## Some Things That Help Us Feel Strong:

Increase our awareness of, and our dedication to, satisfying our needs...which are the same needs that every person has:

- o **Acknowledgement:** for our unique experiences, ideas and perspective in the world
- o **Agency:** feeling like you are in charge of your life and that you make decisions about your life.
- o **Autonomy:** the ability to decide for yourself, to do things on your own
- o **Belonging:** acceptance, in a group or relationship (all kinds), engagement with others
- o **Character:** your unique qualities, idiosyncrasies, values, strengths and ways of seeing the world
- o **Communicating:** sharing your thoughts; listening - with care - to others
- o **Compassion:** care, understanding, patience – for others and for ourselves
- o **Confidence:** believing you are capable and you can commit.
- o **Cooking** your meals from scratch; with others if you can
- o **Cooperation:** working with others on a shared project. "Many hands make light work."
- o **Drinking** plenty of water!
- o **Eating** healthy, fresh and home-cooked food including plenty of fruits and vegetables
- o **Elevate your heart-rate:** by walking, running, riding, rowing, etc. for at least 30 minutes every day
- o **Exercise and fresh air:** are both great for physical and mental health
- o **Faith:** in your abilities, that you are valuable, that things can get better, spiritual faith
- o **Gratitude:** for what we have, for what others do, for a new day to start fresh
- o **Goals:** setting and reaching achievable goals
- o **Flexibility:** be ready to flow with change...bend, don't break! ...for mental and physical health
- o **Healthy mental engagement:** conversations, problem solving, imagining possibilities, listening
- o **Healthy physical engagement:** caring for plants, walking a dog, mowing our neighbor's lawn
- o **Humanness:** listening, empathizing, caring, feeling excitement and encouragement
- o **Humor:** helpful to lighten our burden for a minute; add a new perspective
- o **Identity:** understanding and accepting our unique skills, values, attributes, character traits, and relationships with others. Our identity changes as we change; it is fluid.
- o **Meaning:** why we do what we do, purpose, value, beliefs, big picture, self-transcendence
- o **Music:** is evocative. It can be cathartic, mood-changing, reflective, powerful and much more.
- o **Opportunity:** finding and/or creating possibilities; feeling like we're not stuck
- o **Outdoors:** taking walks in the sun, stargazing at night, planting a garden, connecting with nature
- o **Reading + Learning:** theories, stories, newspapers; discovering many types of diversity and creativity
- o **Power:** self-efficacy and capability: to maintain our health, our success, our relationships
- o **Reducing** processed sugars, saturated fats, habits we don't like, self-defeating thinking
- o **Reflecting** on your values, your path, your reasons to be grateful, your vision for yourself, your next moves; long-term goals, people in your life, what you can offer the next generation
- o **Resilience:** our ability to adapt to stress and adversity, and even grow stronger because of it!
- o **Respect:** giving it, expecting it, receiving it, helping others understand it and offer it.
- o **Satisfaction:** setting achievable goals and reaching them, being grateful for what we have
- o **Success:** measured by relationships and reaching goals; not by an accumulation of money or stuff
- o **Trust:** believing in yourself and developing trust with others; crucial for good health
- o **Ubuntu:** realizing everything is connected; you support others and others support you
- o **Value:** what is important? what unique gifts do we bring? how do we 'add value'?
- o **Volunteering:** offering our gifts to others, receiving gifts in return!
- o **Yoga / meditation / stretching / rest:** Taking mental and physical time out of our fast-paced world.

## Some Things That Help our Neighborhoods Feel Strong:

- o **Capabilities:** our abilities grow with knowledge and confidence; this happens alone and in groups!
- o **Care:** about our health and our contributions; also, about the concerns and perspectives of others, care about our air, water, soil and living things that give us life, and care about the future
- o **Constructive Learning:** we can learn, and we can learn to solve problems, together!
- o **Imagination:** we'll have to be creative to envision and create a satisfying future together.
- o **Listening:** everyone is important! We need to be heard, yes; and we also need to listen carefully.

# UBUNTU: Swellness for Humanity

Ubuntu is a sub-Saharan African philosophy that recognizes the interdependence of life. It means:

**I am who I am because of who we all are.**

**"The 'solitary individual' is a contradiction in terms. A person is a person through other persons."**

- Archbishop Desmond Tutu

I am a person among and within other persons. I learned how to be a person through my relationships. We are born in relationship and we exist in relationship. My destiny is inexorably bound to yours. Any concept of separation is an illusion. I cannot hurt you without hurting myself, and the only way I can become the best version of me is by supporting you to become the best version of yourself.

The term is often used to describe human relationships, and it can be expanded to include our relationship to all living things as well as our planet, which keeps us alive. Ubuntu begs us to take greater ownership our swellness, as well as the swellness of everything around us...because our safety, our security, our success and our needs depend on the swellness of others and the world around us.

## UBUNTU: Building Social Fabric

When I present Fair Shake in prisons, sometimes people ask me if I can connect them to mentors that can bolster their reentry success. They also ask about opportunities to give back to their community or to support the youth.

These desires reflect our need for belonging, and the philosophy of UBUNTU. When these deep feelings are engaged, they strengthen our social fabric.

But this ideal is difficult to achieve. Today we are discouraged from solving problems together, or trusting one another. We are expected to ask the 'experts' and 'professionals'. We are told to purchase products and services, but we are not educated to understand how to build stronger relationships - even though healthy, caring relationships are vital for building a

safe and satisfying future.

Since this understanding is rarely taught, we need to study, to listen, to be curious, to be open, to reflect, to share our perspective, to care...and then to collaborate with others to conjure and create trust, cooperation, and possibility.

Despite what pundits and politicians promise, no one can "fix" our challenges without our participation.

Once we understand that developing ourselves is vital to developing healthy communities, jobs and relationships, it will be much easier to build a successful democracy that can pay attention to civic life. When we work together to solve problems, we begin to create more of what we want, which has the potential to improve everyone's quality of life.

To encourage people to see a hopeful and convincing picture, I consulted with the author of *The Business of Belief*, Tom Asacker. He reminded me that we are not motivated by logic; we are driven by our beliefs -based on our feelings and experiences. He also told me that we need a clear picture of where we can go, in order to move ourselves toward a goal. When we change our belief of what is possible, we can change our attitude, and when we change our attitude, we change our approach and our ability to solve problems.

When we realize that we must do this together, we realize that no one understands the situation like we do, we realize "we are the ones we've been waiting for." I'm looking forward to building the future with you. Ubuntu!

**What can one person do? They can join others to build our SOCIAL SAFETY NET!**

"I need you to be YOU!...so that I can be me." - Desmond Tutu

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"I want you to be all that you can be, so that I can be all that I can be!" - Desmond Tutu