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## **“LIVIN’ THE GOOD LIFE”: INCORPORATING HEALTH AND WELLNESS INTO OUR BUSY LIVES**

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### **INTRODUCTION**

Have you ever uttered the words, “I’m stressed”? If you answered yes, you’re not alone. Results from the American Psychological Association’s *2010 Stress in America Survey* documented that “chronic stress....is becoming a public health crisis” (APA, 2011). Data indicated “most Americans are suffering from moderate to high stress, with 44 percent reporting that their stress levels have increased over the past five years” (APA, 2011). High rates of reported stress could be attributed to our busy lifestyles. We strive to fit as much as we can into our days, trying to combine our personal demands with our professional responsibilities.

Stress often has a negative connotation. However, stress can have both positive and negative effects on our health. Eustress is considered positive stress. “Stress is positive when it forces us to adapt and thus to increase the strength of our adaption mechanisms” (Girdano, Dusek & Everly, Jr., 2009, p. 3). In comparison, distress is considered negative stress, “...when it exceeds our ability to cope, fatigues body systems, and causes behavioral or physical problems” (Girdano, Dusek & Everly, Jr., 2009, p. 3). As Greenberg (2011) illustrates, “Our goal should be to limit the harmful effects of stress while maintaining life’s quality and vitality” (p. 12).

Health and wellness are terms we often use interchangeably but they have different meanings. Health, when defined holistically, is composed of seven dimensions: Physical, social, mental, emotional, occupational, environmental, and spiritual (Greenberg, 2011). “The extent and degree to which you possess these components of health determine how healthy you are” (Greenberg, 2011, p. 15). Wellness, however, “is the degree to which these components of health are in balance” (Greenberg, 2011, p. 15). Interestingly, “only 40% of [the respondents to the APA Stress in America survey] rate[d] their health as very good or excellent” (APA, 2011). Furthermore, their responses also indicated an understanding that personal behaviors contributed to poor perceptions of personal health (APA, 2011).

Knowing our choices, experiences, and perceptions impact our health and wellness (Greenberg, 2011), an important question to explore as we strive to live a well life, is how to live a life in balance. Health and its seven dimensions must all be considered when thinking about how to live a balanced life. If one dimension is out of balance, it can affect the other dimensions, thus increasing feelings of stress. This paper provides a four-step process to assist you in your efforts to adopt a balanced healthy and well lifestyle.

### **Strategies for Success**

One approach to help individuals reflect on the different dimensions of health and associated healthy behaviors involves four steps:

**Step 1:** Brainstorm 2-3 examples of healthy behaviors for each of the seven dimensions of health. *Example:* Responses that illustrate behaviors for the first dimension of health, physical health, might include regular exercise and eating a balanced and nutritious diet.

**Step 2:** Identify which of the dimensions of health you can work on to improve your health and wellness. *Example:* Someone who is feeling stressed by relationships at work might choose to work on dimensions two and five, social and occupational, respectively.

**Step 3:** Identify challenges you might encounter to enact healthy behavior changes. *Example:* If physical health is chosen as an area for improvement and increasing the amount of daily exercise is one way to show positive improvement, common challenges faced may be a perceived lack of time or persistence to continue a program once it has been started.

**Step 4:** Explore options to make constructive behavior changes in the areas of health you have identified for improvement. *Example:* Ideas of possible options could include employing goal setting strategies (i.e. how many minutes of exercise per day with incremental increases over time), the use of a journal to keep track of your behavior change efforts (i.e. diet options and triggers that impact food choices), or attempting to improve time management strategies (i.e. to find ways to organize your day to allow for time spent exercising).

### **CONCLUSION**

As we consider ways to decrease stress in our lives and move toward a healthy and well lifestyle, striving to live a balanced life is essential. Through careful reflection and by following the four steps outlined above, you can start on a constructive path to achieving balance.

## REFERENCES

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