

# Wellness and Wellbeing for Parents

By Dr. Karen Prentice

How many of us ever contemplate wellness and wellbeing? We all try to be “healthy”-eat healthy, exercise, be nice, recycle, get good grades, and try your hardest. Do any of us sit and think whether we are “well.” Do you feel well? If we really think about the definition of wellness we have to think about the whole person and consider not only our body, but our mind and spirit. The goal of the following advice is to empower YOU, whether you are the kid or the adult, to make changes to improve your wellbeing. You have the power to not only lead a healthy life but to feel “well” and enjoy good health, both mentally and physically. The following is researched based and time tested.

## What Your Body Needs to Achieve Wellness:

1. **Spirituality/Faith**-Most of us all know the following, but we do not always think of spirituality and faith as part of wellness. Medical studies tell us that people who have a faith belief system are less likely to suffer from self-destructive behaviors such as smoking, drug and alcohol abuse and suicide. Studies also show that spirituality and faith help promote good health by boosting our immune system, reducing depression and anxiety and aiding with high blood pressure. Being part of a congregation, whatever your religious preference, gives families a supportive environment to raise their children.
2. **Social Support/Family and Friends**- According to Greek Philosophy, humanity can be differentiated from other forms of living creatures by the deep need to associate and affiliate with others. We need friendship, family, and a sense of belonging. Critical to this is human touch. A hug or a touch on the shoulder can lower blood pressure, decrease pain and elevate mood. It is easy for most of us to hug and kiss our babies and young children, but did you know that teenagers are desperate for human touch? Teens often give off the “vibe” that they don’t want to be touched or hugged, when in actuality they really need it. Go ahead, hug a teen today!
3. **Family Meals**-Studies show that families who share 3-4 meals together per week are happier and healthier. Children and teens who regularly enjoy family meals have a lower rate of teen pregnancy and drug and alcohol use and perform better in school. In addition, families who have regular meals together eat more nutritious foods, are less likely to suffer from being overweight, and have fewer eating disorders. Please collect everyone’s cell phones and electronics and put them away before the meal. Enjoy a media free meal!
4. **Sleep**-A good night’s sleep helps the body grow, restore itself, heal, and enables the body to have the strength to fight off illness and infection.
5. **Exercise**-An hour a day of an exercise that you enjoy not only helps your body stay strong and at a healthy weight, but studies show exercise is critical for good mental health. Exercise can improve depression, anxiety and help children and adults with ADHD focus better. People who exercise regularly have fewer illnesses and infections. Try to do something fun that involves exercise about an hour a day. It does not have to be an hour straight! You can do a 20 or 30 minute activity and later go walk the dog for 15 minutes then later swim or ride a bike for 10 or 15 minutes. Make sure it is fun so you and your child stay with it. If you can find something to do outside, combining both time in nature and exercise is even more beneficial to your overall wellbeing. Look on our website for our “Get Fit” handout for fun activities to do in Phoenix.

6. **Nature**-Most of us are nature deprived. Studies show spending time in nature helps us to calm down mentally, enjoy some vitamin D, and have improved self-esteem and overall wellbeing. For more information about nature deprivation and the benefits of being in nature, read **Last Child in the Woods** by Richard Louv.
7. **Nutrition**-I could write a book about the benefits of a healthy diet-actually, I already did, to be published fall, 2015! Most of us know that if we keep a healthy weight and eat healthy foods we can reduce our risks for heart disease, cancer, and diabetes. Did you know that eating a healthy diet can also improve your mental wellbeing? It makes sense. The following is a general run-down of our daily nutritional requirements.
  - **4-5 Servings of Vegetables per day (organic if possible)**
  - **3-4 Servings of Fresh Fruit per day (organic if possible)**
  - **3-4 Servings of a Dairy or Calcium/Vitamin D Rich Food per day**
  - **5 Servings of Whole Grains such as brown rice or quinoa per day**
  - **3 Servings of a Protein food per day such as beans, nut butter, fish, chicken or tofu**

Serving size varies with age, sex, activity level and growth phase your child is in. Use the Myplate method when serving your family meals with half of their plate fruits and vegetables and ¼ of the plate a protein food and ¼ of the plate a whole grain. Ask your doctor for the Pediatric Anti-inflammatory Food Pyramid by Dr. Weil or look on our website, for examples of healthy foods. For more information and recipes, check out my book, *An Apple a Day the Doctor's Way* coming soon.
8. **Water**-Drink at least 8-10 glasses of water per day.
9. **Safety**-Make sure to properly use car seats and booster seats. Your baby should be in a car seat rear-facing until 2 years old, then in a full 5 point harness car seat forward facing until 5 years old and 50 pounds. After 5 years old when they have outgrown the car seat, use a booster seat until they are 57 inches tall. For children taller than 57 inches, keep them in the back seat of the car with a seat belt until they are 100 pounds and 13 years old. Baby proof your house and have a pool fence or catch a kid net on your pool. Always use bike helmets for bike riding and helmets and elbow and knee pads for scooter or skate board riding. Use sunscreen. For more detailed safety information, please see the stepping stones hand out for your child's age.
10. **Dental Health**-Keeping healthy teeth and gums is vital to your health. Have your baby see a pediatric dentist between 1 and 2 years old and then every 6 months after for check-ups and cleanings

#### **What Your Body Doesn't Need:**

1. **Negative Foods/Drinks/Drugs**-Avoid processed foods, preservatives, nitrates, artificial sweeteners such as Splenda, aspartame and Nutra sweet, food dyes especially Red Dye #40 and Yellow Dye #5, and caffeine. Avoid sugar drinks such as soda, juice and Gatorade and avoid sugary foods. Read food labels carefully and if the food contains ingredients that you don't recognize-avoid it! Avoid alcohol, smoking and drug use.
2. **Negative Activities**-To paraphrase one of my favorite bible verses, "whatever is true, noble, right, pure, lovely, admirable, excellent or praiseworthy-think about such things." Monitor what your child or teen is watching or playing. Stick with "G" movies for little ones and "PG" only for

older school age kids. For video games or online games, stick with “E” rated games for everyone. Remember that too much of even a good thing is a bad thing. The following is the American Academy of Pediatrics recommendation for screen time:

- Children less than years old: no screen time
- Children Greater Than 2 years old: Only 1-2 hours per day of combined electronic time including iPhone, iPad, T.V., computers or video games.

**3. Negative Thoughts-**Teach your child or teen to avoid self-put downs and appreciate what makes them special and unique. Find activities that they can enjoy with family and friends. Teach them to avoid bullying or being unkind to others. Teach your child or teen that if they are in a situation where they are being bullied they need to tell someone they trust. If they are feeling stressed or anxious and are having a hard time dealing with it, make an appointment for them to see their doctor.