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# Invest in Yourself: Evaluating Your Holistic Health

## Introduction

The concept of holistic healing originated nearly 5,000 years ago in ancient China and India. These early healers encouraged living a healthy life in harmony with nature and the surrounding world. Though this concept has existed for thousands of years, the term “holism” wasn’t coined until 1926 by a South African philosopher, Jan Smuts.<sup>1</sup> It would take another 50 years until people began taking the idea of holistic healing seriously. Even today, some people are skeptical of it since modern, western medicine tends to focus primarily on treating symptoms.<sup>2</sup> However, holistic health focuses on supporting the body, mind, and spirit as a whole—healing and total wellness are the underlying goals of this approach.

No one knows your body like you do. That’s why it’s imperative to take time to evaluate your own health—including the connections between any physical conditions and your mental or emotional state.

## Physical

While many aspects of physical health need attention, three of the most important are nutrition, exercise, and sleep.

There is no “one size fits all” when it comes to nutrition, but some general practices can lead to sustainable habits. The United States Department of Agriculture recommends that during meals, adults fill half their plates with fruits and vegetables.<sup>3</sup> In 2013, the CDC reported that 76% of American adults didn’t follow the recommendations for daily fruit intake. An even higher percentage failed to meet the daily vegetable requirement.<sup>4</sup> Fad diets and fast weight-loss programs are not the best place to start. Instead, consuming a wide variety of fresh food to obtain the nutrients your body needs, while also paying attention to portion sizes, is a more realistic and maintainable goal to improve your nutritional status. Focusing on long-term wellness is a more beneficial goal that can help you slowly make sustainable lifestyle changes.

Exercise is another crucial element of physical health. Researchers recommend 30 minutes of moderate physical activity every day.<sup>5</sup> Regular exercise is linked to better heart health and it can

act as a safeguard against certain types of cancers. Find a fitness regimen that is right for you—from cardio to yoga, on your own or with others. Any activity is better than none at all.

Physical health is also largely dependent on sleep. In a recent study, the National Sleep Foundation discovered that adults between the ages of 18 and 64 need seven to nine hours of sleep per night.<sup>6</sup> Pay attention to your mood and energy levels after a poor night's sleep compared to a good night's sleep. Think of sleep as a self-care task that needs to be accomplished—it isn't something you can consistently skimp on.

When analyzing your physical health, ask yourself questions. When did you feel your physical best? What lifestyle changes have you made since that time? Though your needs might differ from someone else's, prioritizing nutrition, exercise, and sleep is essential for sustainable wellness.

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## Emotional

Our generation is plagued with stress—at work, at home, everywhere. Reducing your stress levels may seem like an impossible feat; however, it's necessary for your emotional state. The National Institute of Health recommends regularly practicing relaxation methods in the quiet of your home.<sup>7</sup> Prioritizing moments of solitude helps you step away from tense situations and process your emotions.

Channeling positive thinking is another way to better your emotional health. The Mayo Clinic even links positivity to an increased lifespan, lower rates of depression, and better cardiovascular health.<sup>8</sup> Thankfully, even if you're a notorious "negative nelly," you can train yourself to change—turn negative self-talk into positive ideas. Instead of "I've never done this before; I can't do it," alter your thought to: "I've never done this, which means I have an opportunity to learn something new." Positive thinking skills take time and effort. You're working to create a new habit, and habits aren't built in a day.

Emotional health needs to become one of your priorities. When you live in a state of stress or negativity, it affects everyday functioning. Embrace self-reflection. Set aside time for meditation, even if you feel silly doing it. Fully acknowledge what you are feeling—and how it links to your thought patterns, moods, and behaviors. The more stable your emotional health, the better prepared you are to adeptly handle life's stresses.

## Spiritual

This aspect of holistic health will look very different from one person to another. Spiritual health is not related to a specific religion or belief system—it refers to a sense of purpose, direction, and meaning in your personal life.<sup>9</sup> To encourage your spirituality, dedicate a small chunk of time each day to yourself, free of distractions, interruptions, and major activities. Meditation and relaxation are great tools. The National Institute of Health recommends training your breathing patterns to increase mindful awareness. Try breathing in through your nose to a count of four, hold for one

second, and then exhale through the mouth for a count of five.<sup>10</sup> Learning to relax creates a space for personal reflection and intentionality.

Reflecting on your values is another important step in spiritual health. Try keeping a journal and writing down your top three values in life. Return to them regularly to ground yourself and increase your sense of purpose.

## Intellectual

Intellectual health may seem like an odd concept. However, it's crucial for your overall well-being to consistently engage the mind. It is incredibly easy to let your mental abilities grow stagnant. The daily activities of life—taking care of kids, fixing meals, driving to work, paying bills—can wear you down physically and mentally.

One way to stimulate your intellect is by joining a book club or visiting your local library. Reading a book at the end of a long day might sound unappealing, but having an accountability partner or group can lend an extra boost of motivation. If you have limited time in your day, turn on a stimulating podcast during your morning commute or while doing dishes.

Many adults also enroll in continuing education classes through a local community college or university. The classroom environment keeps your brain fresh by challenging your thinking and providing you with conversations you might not have otherwise. If you're too busy to attend a class, try an online course. Rather than wishing for more time in the day, work with the time you do have.

Little tasks can help, too—like puzzles, sudoku, or strategy games. Fostering your mental capabilities, participating in critical thinking, and engaging with challenging concepts keeps your mind sharp and lets you tap into your full intellectual potential.

## Conclusion

The American Holistic Health Association says, “Holistic health is actually an approach to life. It emphasizes the connection of mind, body, and spirit. The goal is to achieve maximum well-being, where everything is functioning the very best that is possible.”<sup>11</sup> Holistic healing lets you view your body as a connected organism. If something is off in your physical health, your emotions and mental health will also be affected. Dedicate time to evaluate all aspects of your well-being.

At Trinity School of Natural Health, we teach holistic wellness. Whether you want to learn about exercise and nutrition or participate in classes to keep your mind sharp, we are dedicated to providing you with the tools you need to succeed. To learn about the programs we offer—and how they can empower you to explore your intellectual capabilities—[visit our website](#).

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## REFERENCES

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