

Taking a wellness approach

What is a 'wellness approach'?

Over recent years, health knowledge has developed with an understanding that it is better for everyone's overall health and wellbeing to not only maintain good physical health but also to look after our mental, spiritual and emotional health. A 'wellness approach' takes all these aspects of health into account and considers people's needs and goals in each area.

We know it makes sense – you need to, 'Use it, or lose it', but, as people age, they often become less physically active. There are many reasons for this; we might begin to think 'We're too old', or our lifestyle changes so we are not as busy as we once were. We might also think – after working hard for years – it's time for a rest! Without realising it, everyday activity has decreased.

Keeping active is also a great way to improve mood. It doesn't need to be a session at the gym – walking or gardening are great ways to maintain your fitness. Physical activity can have many benefits for everyone, particularly older people:

- > Physical activity increases strength and can help prevent falls.
- > Maintaining strength can help prevent or delay osteoporosis in older people.
- > A medically-approved physical activity program can help people manage chronic conditions, such as diabetes.
- > Good levels of physical fitness can help people recover more quickly after surgery or illness.



Keeping our minds active

Just as keeping physically active can help our mood and overall health, mental activity can also have long-term health benefits.

Mental activity can include:

- > reading
- > having a discussion

- > learning something new – whether that be a new language, a new skill such as cooking or how to use an iPad
- > doing puzzles, scrabble, sudoku or playing games.

While older people can sometimes be restricted in their movement, maintaining mental stimulation is vital for overall wellbeing. Like anyone else, older people can be susceptible to depression and low moods. This can lead to a weakened immune system and other health problems.

Keeping mentally alert can delay or prevent the severity of conditions such as Alzheimer's disease. Keeping an active mind is a great way to prevent ill health and maintain wellbeing.

Looking after spiritual wellbeing

Looking after our internal, spiritual life can mean different things to different people, and can vary at different times of life. For some it may be connection to a religious faith and community, and for others it may be connection to general belief systems or to cultural traditions. Spiritual wellbeing may not be a priority at all for some people.

In contrast, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities have a holistic sense of social and emotional wellbeing which sees connection to culture, to Country, to spirituality and ancestors as key to maintaining good physical and mental health.

Looking after emotional wellbeing

Maintaining emotional health and wellbeing is important at any age as it can directly affect our physical health. When people feel down, they are more susceptible to infections. They also feel less like getting out and about or less motivated to take on something new.

Keeping connected with other people is a great way to maintain emotional wellbeing. Older people can be at risk of social isolation. Their social networks can get smaller if it is hard to physically get out of the house, if they have lost a partner, friends or neighbours and it is difficult to keep in touch with family. This can trigger depression and a range of emotional and mental responses that can affect their physical health.

Key messages

- > Keeping physically and mentally active is vital for the health and wellbeing of all people.
- > Keeping socially connected is just as important as physical or mental health. It can help lift peoples' mood, their enjoyment of life and overall wellbeing.
- > Spiritual wellbeing can be very important to some people and can be expressed and maintained in many different ways.