



“Pause for Wellness”™

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## Creating a Healthy Family, Part 1

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What does being healthy truly mean? The word itself stems from an Old English word meaning “whole.” Somehow our society moved away from this understanding of health. Now, many people tend to think the term healthy simply applies to one’s body. Specifically, many people think that being healthy means the absence of disease in the body. Actually, being healthy means much more than that. In fact, at its core healthy actually means being holistic.

Being healthy means functioning at your best physically, mentally, emotionally, socially, and spiritually. This is the wholeness indicated in the origin of the word. Functioning at your best does not mean seeking or maintaining a state of perfection. Different people have different optimal states. Someone with a disability can be optimally healthy. They simply have a different baseline than someone who does not have a disability. The level of optimal health might even fluctuate within the same person at various points in her life. For example, a healthy woman might be able to ride a bike at peak speed for fifteen miles, but if she is eight months pregnant she might not be able to comfortably sit on a stationary bicycle. This doesn’t mean she isn’t healthy, it simply means her baseline has temporarily shifted.

There are five arenas that primarily impact health. Each arena not only affects individual health, but also affects the overall health of the family unit. This article will describe each arena and how it applies to an individual. In the next issue, you will learn how these arenas apply to the health of the family unit.

The first arena is the most obvious. It is the **physical arena**. The physical arena is not only the body, but also the tangible things you put in, on, or do to your body. This category includes things people readily associate with physical health, like diet and exercise, as well as less obvious things in one’s physical environment. These include pets, toiletries, detergent, and household cleaning solutions. It also includes the neighborhood in which you live, air pollution, and water quality. All these items can impact one’s health. For example, people who live in rural areas typically have healthier lungs than people who live in crowded cities. Exposure to indoor pollutants



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that stem from carpets, paint, or household cleaners might adversely affect someone sensitive to toxins. A child with eczema might be more sensitive to certain soaps, lotions, and detergents.

The next two arenas are often confused with each other. They have distinct meanings, though they closely influence each other. The **mental arena** is different from the **emotional arena**. The mental arena is the arena that deals with thoughts and beliefs. This arena is impacted by mental constructs such as judgments, opinions, worry, and mental chatter. Mental chatter is the little voice inside your head. Your inner voice can either be a major asset in creating health, or a major obstacle. It is an asset if your natural tendency is to dwell on positive thoughts that encourage and uplift you. It is an obstacle if you tend to dwell on negative thoughts that discourage or deplete you.

The **emotional arena** is the arena of feelings. Many people confuse thoughts and opinions with emotions. Emotions are feelings such as happy, sad, love, angry, fear, jealousy, or enthusiasm. An example of an unhealthy emotional arena is road rage. An example of a healthy one is a joyful person.

People often blend the mental and emotional arenas when they use the statement, “I feel that...” Usually they actually mean, “I think that...” For example, the statement, “I feel that you should have listened to my opinion,” is inaccurate. An accurate statement would either be, “I think you should have listened to my opinion,” or “I feel angry that you didn’t listen to my opinion.”

The fourth arena is the **social arena**. This is the arena that involves relationships, support systems, hobbies, and work. This arena can promote health by bringing balance and satisfaction to one’s life. It can also indicate that someone is at risk for imbalances in other arenas. For example, if someone is physically fit, eats well and exercises regularly and is generally a positive and happy person, but is a workaholic without any supportive relationships, that person is probably not living their best life. They would likely be even happier and more energetic if they had a balanced social arena. They are also at risk for imbalance in the emotional and mental arenas because they have no social outlets to balance work, or emotional support system if challenges arise in their life.

The last arena is the **spiritual arena**. This is the arena that deals with your values and life philosophy. It is the arena that helps you make sense out of life. For many people, this



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comes from their religious beliefs, but the spiritual arena is not about religion. It is about the core beliefs that motivate and inspire people to live their best life. This is the arena that helps people get through tragedies. It also helps them feel satisfied with their life. A balanced spiritual arena can also help someone deal with challenges in any of the other arenas. For example if someone must deal with cancer (physical), a negative self-image (mental), depression( emotional) or a divorce (social), having a strong spiritual arena will assist them in dealing with that challenge. Conversely, someone who has the other four arenas balanced, but an unbalanced spiritual arena, might feel extremely unsatisfied with life or think their life is meaningless.

Considering all the arenas which impact health will help you and your family members become truly healthy. Focusing on the holistic meaning of health will also help you focus on attaining and maintaining a state of wellness, rather than simply focusing on preventing, treating, or curing illness. Since we usually get what we focus on, it is better to focus on “being healthy,” instead of “not getting sick.”

Be well!