

HOW TO LIVE WELL IN 2013

A new year means a new outlook on life, last month we looked at stress, now Drew Knowles shares his secrets for a more fulfilling life while optimising your wellness so you can achieve your personal bests...

Approximately 80 percent of adults in our country have some form of chronic health challenge and they are on some form of medication for it. Sixty-five percent of adults in New Zealand are overweight or obese. Depression is set to be the largest non-fatal disease burden for our country (and the western world) by the year 2020. Studies are now showing that the huge increase in chronic health challenges like depression, type-II diabetes and obesity are lifestyle and stress related and could be prevented – in essence rather than just blaming bad genetics or family history, it's the environment (lifestyle) that we are in that really determines our level of overall wellness. If you are an adult, chances are you are in one of these statistical categories, and while you may say to yourself "I'm fine", "I'll deal with it later", "It's not that bad", I just invite you to look out into the future a little, and ask yourself – "If I continue doing what I have been doing and thinking the way I have been thinking about my wellness and health, and have the same amount or more stress in my life, and keep the same lifestyle I have been living, where will I be in five years or ten years." Especially if you are in the 20–40 age group, you will unlikely be seeing the effects of your lifestyle choices and the chronic stress you may be under, it is so easy to just ignore the signs and symptoms your mind and body are giving you to change your lifestyle.

As a Mind Coach I focus on training and coaching people in how to manage their mind more effectively to improve their performance, productivity and overall quality of life. In my last article I gave you four different areas you could work on to have your mind be a weapon for success in 2013. They were:

- Complete 2012 and create a clean slate in your mind for 2013.
- Maximise the energy your brain has to perform at its best.
- Use the SCARF Model to minimise threats and maximise rewards to your brain.
- Feed your mind the "Healthy Mind Platter".

In this article I want to go beyond just the mind and create a bigger picture of what it is to live a wellness lifestyle – which includes mind and body.

If you want to maximise the use of your mind and body and live a longer, happier life, then this article may give you a perspective on what you can go to work on to achieve this. I am not going to give you a new fad, or all the latest tips – my commitment is to give you a way to think, act and be about your overall wellness and state of mind, such that you can start to alter whatever habits, behaviours and patterns of thinking that you need to in the aim of living a Wellness Lifestyle. Changing habits, behaviours and patterns of thinking that have been around for a long time takes conscious effort and practice, hence why we so naturally gravitate towards the "silver bullet", "quick-fix" and "little thinking required" answers to trying to change our old ways. Your brain is wired for conserving the limited amount of energy or resources (glucose) that it has in the pre-frontal cortex, which is the part of the brain you need to use to execute changes over time and have them last. So it is no wonder that making changes to your habits, behaviours and patterns of thinking takes a lot of time and effort (sorry for the bad news for those on the eternal search for the next silver bullet to life long health and wellness!).

Your lifestyle includes everything you are typically doing in your day-to-day life, and if it is not promoting and producing wellness



for you in body and mind, then you will struggle long term to keep up the kind of energy levels, brain-power, work-life balance and general well-being that you are committed to. Living what I call a “Wellness Lifestyle” creates the mind-set and kind of life where you are deliberately and actively at work on providing your mind and body the right nutrients and environment to be able to perform in all areas of life that are important to you.

I define a wellness lifestyle as “the quality or state of being in healthy body and mind as an actively sought goal; and as the result of deliberate effort, it is the typical way of life.”

It is being aware of and understanding the innate (inbuilt, inborn, natural) design of being human and making choices that have you living consistent with that design. It is getting that your body and your mind are not separate and do not operate independent of each other. You are a holistic being and your body and your mind are connected and work as one – I call it “the mind-body”.

You don't “do” a wellness lifestyle, it starts with a mind-set or the way you are thinking and being – the framework that guides your thoughts and actions. This framework gives you the way you view your wellness, health and fitness such that you take actions consistent with this view. It's where you come from and think from in life – it informs your actions and choices. It is the embodiment of the innate design of being human and understanding how it works such that you can be used by that design and make natural choices that promote a wellness lifestyle.

A wellness lifestyle is managing yourself to deal with and satisfy the requirements of all the nutrients that the human mind-body needs to function well and even optimally. It is not a place one arrives to and then it is “handled” and you no longer need to be deliberately at work on it. It is something that is managed over time as a way of thinking, being and acting in life, and dealt with from that view when things get out of balance. It takes time, practice and the application of the right knowledge to become someone who is reliable for managing to live a wellness lifestyle. It is not a short-term endeavor, it is a lifetime endeavor. It is making conscious, mature choices to act consistent with what you know it looks like to live a wellness lifestyle, and being willing to deal with the consequences of not. It is not a perfect state to attain – it is about you knowing how your mind-body works, and knowing that whatever choices you make will have you somewhere on the spectrum of wellness – the aim being to keep yourself at the end of the spectrum where you experience and are living a wellness lifestyle, and at times you will do things that have you at the other end of the spectrum (which is all part of a living life in modern day). That is why it is pertinent to understand that there is no silver bullet and you are not expected to be perfect.

However if you think that you don't have to consciously and deliberately be at work on living a lifestyle of wellness (for your whole life) to have a long, happy and healthy quality of life and somehow it will just magically get you out of bed in the morning or descend upon you then you are being naïve and have been

deluded by the marketing of modern day – it will have you end up where you are currently headed and you will likely be one of the chronic ill-health statistics I mentioned earlier and your quality of life will not be what it could be.

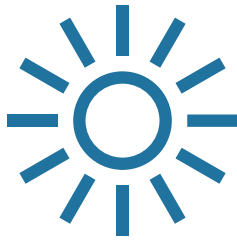
Sometimes in life we choose to do things that we know make us feel good in the short term and gratify us momentarily, and that whether we were aware at the time or not have a negative consequence on us later on. For example, eating junk or processed foods that just “taste good” but we know are unhealthy, sitting on the comfort of the couch to watch TV and not moving and not getting out to exercise, staying out late drinking, partying, socialising and not sleeping enough when you know you have other commitments to be on the ball for. While this is a very human way to act, it is also an infantile way to behave – just watch how children behave when there is something they want. Children are not reliable for, and have a low level capacity, for thinking through the consequences of wanting and having something now. However as adults, we do have this capacity and can make choices contrary to our childish wants!

Then there are the times when, regardless of what our rational mind tells us, we still sometimes find ourselves acting like a child and going for the short term gratification. This is not a problem, and not a reason to throw the baby out with the bath water and go back to your old habits – which is what we often do – and tell ourselves something like “oh see there you go again, what's the point, you can't stick to anything”, or whatever your version of that negative self-talk is.

To live a wellness lifestyle means understanding that you will find yourself doing things you know just feel good or are comfortable and don't promote wellness, and it takes being willing to be responsible for this part of our humanity most of the time and take the appropriate actions to get ourselves back to balance when we go for the short term gratification of having something now.

In this day and age it is pretty much impossible to be free of all the stressors we are constantly exposed to in life and the things that create deficiencies and toxicities in our mind-body. We all live in an industrial technological age. My advice would be to create a set point for your wellness where 100 percent wellness is if you are making wellness lifestyle choices for about 80 percent of your life, rather than trying to attain some form of perfection.

While it would be great if a state of perfect wellness was possible all the time, and you did not have to work at it constantly to maintain, but working at making about 80 percent of your choices consistent with a wellness lifestyle will give you the experience of a level of energy and vitality that gives you the opportunity to fulfill what you want in life. Unless you want to move to the country where you live off the land, grow your own food, and remove all possible stressors and toxins, you cannot avoid these things and I think it would be naïve to think you can attain some kind of perfect wellness.



Accepting this fact of our current lifestyle means you can take actions that balance out the effects of these environmental and life stressors on your mind-body and keep you living a wellness lifestyle. Everything your mind-body does and the messages it sends are a perfect and innate response to whatever toxins or deficiencies that you have in your body, mind or environment or to whatever purity and sufficiency you supply it with. It is always trying to bring you to balance.

The problem is, with modern society and everything we are constantly exposed to that is not natural and holistic, we have become numb to the signals and messages our mind-body feeds us, and have learnt to live with sickness and disease as a normal part of being human (and growing old). At best as long as we are free from symptoms of sickness and disease we are "fine" and stop acting in accordance with our innate needs and allow ourselves to be seduced by a lifestyle that does not create or promote wellness.

What I always find first needs to change is the way you are thinking – your mind-set. You need to cause a paradigm shift or create a new mind-set (framework) in how you see wellness and your lifestyle. To achieve this you need to understand and begin to embody – that is to say you are in aware and present

to – the nature of being human; how the mind-body works in its magical and perfect innate way; the current condition of life that we live in (modern-day fast-paced convenience world) and all the

environmental influences and structures that are not designed for us to be healthy and well; and your own unique human mechanisms/reactions/triggers in your brain that were developed from re-enforced responses to your past that are barriers to you living a wellness lifestyle.

Living a wellness lifestyle means being empowered in your mind and aware of the conversations that get in the way of you making choices that promote wellness; dealing with your nutrition and eating habits; having sufficient daily movement and physical activity; having a healthy spine and nervous system free from blocks to your bodies ability to express wellness and function properly; creating an environment and structures around you that promote wellness; understanding how to manage your energy such that you have sustained energy and vitality to fulfill all the things that are important to you; and understanding the stress response, the nature of chronic stress, and it's effects on the human mind-body. It is understanding and honoring that your mind-body needs a certain level of sufficiency and purity in what I call the key nutrients for wellness – nerve supply, air/oxygen, water, food/nutrition, movement/physical activity and an empowering/healthy state of mind.

Wellness is a framework of certain ways of thinking and acting and is actually what our mind-body is always seeking for us to survive. Our mind-body will always indicate to us what is going on, the most obvious of these indicators being pain, chronic health issues, illness

and disease. Living a wellness lifestyle is about being aware of how our mind-body is communicating to us and responding accordingly with thoughts and actions that move us towards wellness.

Mostly if we think about health, fitness and wellness, those words conjure up feelings of something that we should all be doing something about. If we are not doing the things we think we should be we may feel guilty or have some negative emotional response to the thoughts. Conversely if we are doing something about our health, fitness and wellness, we will have some assessment of how good we are doing with that, and often we will still think that we should do more, or we will pat ourselves on the back and slack off because we are taking some actions in that area, and we feel "good" and don't have any issues in that area. The key thing here is our relationship to health, fitness and wellness – the context or view in which it is showing up for us, the way we see it or how it is occurring. For most people it shows up or occurs as being good if we are taking actions that have us being healthy, fit and well and bad if we are not – which ultimately leaves us taking or not taking actions consistent with that view.

It is also important to note, that mostly our assessment of our health, fitness and wellness is informed by whatever we have

learned and read ourselves or heard and seen through others, giving us whatever view or framework we have for our wellness from all that information or experience. Very rarely have we actually examined exactly how a human being – who has a fully

integrated, holistic mind-body – works and functions through information from people who have spent their life studying and examining it. Wellness does not show up for us as a paradigm or framework to think and act from, it occurs for us as something we should be doing – that mostly we are not doing, or don't know what we should be doing. If it did show up as a paradigm or framework to think and act from we would not have a large part of our adult population in the western world dealing with some form of chronic health challenge and illness.

It is also pertinent to point something out right now so you can start seeing the logic here and innate workings of the human mind-body. The point being that it does not really make sense and seems counter-intuitive that wellness does not show up for us as a paradigm or framework to think and act from, given that our mind-body works innately (inbuilt, inborn, natural), independent of us and is always working towards health and wellness, all of the time! Any time you do something (or don't do something you should be doing) your mind-body will respond accordingly so it can continue to create balance in your holistic system and communicate with you if there are things you need to deal with to make you well if things are off or out of balance.

The part we miss is that wellness or being well is a state of being and acting, and at any one time we are somewhere on the spectrum of that experience of being well. Primarily it is not even about how you feel, which again is our main assessment

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for whether or not we are well. To demonstrate why it is not necessarily about how you feel consider the following two examples. If I asked you whether you feel well when you are exercising intensely and doing something that is really challenging you physically, you would likely say no (as it is uncomfortable and sometimes can make you feel a little ill or in pain). However that activity is required sometimes as an important part of living a wellness lifestyle and our innate design to challenge our body and make it stronger. Conversely, if I showed you on an x-ray that some of the nerves in your spine were being impinged which in turn is limiting the amount of nerve supply to a specific area or organ in your body, causing stress hormones to be released and potential dysfunction in that area, you may say you "feel" well. This is because you likely won't feel what is happening in your spine as only two to three percent of the nerves in your spine make you feel pain. This is not to say how you feel is unimportant or irrelevant, however it is just not an accurate test for whether you are healthy, fit and well.

Everything your mind-body does is perfect and an innate response to whatever toxins or deficiencies that you have in your body, mind or environment or to whatever purity and sufficiency you supply it with. Why I say it seems counter-intuitive that wellness does not show up for us as a paradigm or framework to think and act from in an earlier sentence is because your mind-body is always communicating with you about what is going on and what it needs for you to be well. To repeat an earlier sentence – the problem is, with modern society and everything we are constantly exposed to that is not natural and holistic, we have become numb to the signals and messages our mind-body feeds us, and have learnt to live with sickness and disease as a normal part of being human, and at best as long as we are free from symptoms of sickness and disease we are "fine" and stop acting in accordance with our innate needs and allow ourselves to be seduced by a lifestyle that does not create wellness. We justify ourselves by comparing how we are living to how "most people" are living, and we base our wellness on how we feel and as long as our daily lives are not too disrupted or affected in the short term, then we will soldier on (with increasing stress levels) thinking that we will someday deal with our knowing that we are not as fit, healthy and well as we "should be." But unless some health crisis, acute pain, or outside stimulus forces us to deal with it we will keep living this future.

This article will only make a difference beyond some mildly interesting reading while you are waiting to catch a plane or having some down-time, if you choose to become someone who creates your own crisis where you see you need to, and begins dealing with living a wellness lifestyle because you have confronted the probable and most likely future, the consequences that will have on your life and you are not OK to keep living that future. This is something that only you can create – no one can make you listen to your mind-body and think and act in accordance with its innate requirements for wellness and health – it will be a choice you make when you are clear and educated sufficiently about living a wellness lifestyle, what it is, and have a pathway with actions to take to live that way moving into the future.

In saying all of this, and creating what I am saying a wellness lifestyle is and why we are just not naturally thinking and acting from it in our lives, I am well aware of the current world we live in, and the fact that it is not a world designed for us to be able to be completely tuned into our innate and holistic mind-body. It is not "modern societies" fault, nor is there anything wrong with that we are mostly not tuned in to and listening to what our mind-body is communicating to us. It is just a fact of our current life that we are over-stimulated by everything available to us; we dwell in unnatural environments most of the time; we don't take much time out to just be in touch with ourselves and nature; our foods are more and more processed and we do not grow and cultivate them ourselves; and we are human beings who are addicted to short term gratifications to make us feel good, in a world where most people on some level are somewhat dissatisfied in some way with the current state of life that they are living, or the people around them are living. Taking all of this into account and being responsible for that this is the way it is could make it very challenging for us to choose to live a wellness lifestyle consistently throughout our life time.

At this point in reading this you may be in a number of possible spaces – you could be resigned about this even being possible, you may be apathetic, overwhelmed, curious, excited or already living this way. Whatever comes up for you reading this, just allow it to be there and know that whatever is coming up for you to deal with is appropriate, and the more you allow yourself to authentically confront where you are on the spectrum of living a wellness lifestyle (rather than being in denial or avoiding dealing with it), the more you are going to be inclined to start taking actions that are more consistent with what it looks like for you to be living a wellness lifestyle. It is not about making every change all at once or overnight – remember there is only one way to eat an elephant – one bite at a time.

So living a wellness lifestyle is about developing a whole new paradigm and framework to think from and act from that has you being aware of your mind-body in a way that you may never have been aware of and taking your current awareness to a new level to improve your performance, productivity and overall wellness. It may require you altering the way you think, and how you have related to wellness and your view of "how you are doing" in managing this effectively. It will take educating yourself about how the human mind-body works and the innate functions that are always, and at all times doing exactly what they need to be doing to have you express wellness. I say it is a worthwhile life long endeavor to undertake as it is the access to high levels of performance personally and professionally, lower stress, new levels of productivity, greater energy levels, more happiness and a much better quality of life. 

For more information on The Wellness Guy – Drew Knowles – and his specialised coaching and training on managing your mind and dealing with stressors go to thewellnessguy.co.nz or email drew@drewknowles.com.