



# **Strengthening Youth Mental Health by Targeting Wellness in Substance Use Prevention, Intervention & Recovery**

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# Purpose

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Gain an understanding of wellness and its essential role in holistic substance use prevention, intervention and recovery practice for strengthening the mental wellbeing of youth and young adults.



# Session Objectives

1. Describe common models of wellness and how wellness relates to substance abuse, prevention, and mental health.
2. Examine the mental health effects of the Big 3 wellness-promoting lifestyle behaviors of regular physical activity, breakfast and nutrition, and sleep on youth.
3. Explore a 4-step evidence-based model that holistically integrates substance use prevention, intervention and recovery with wellness for enhancing the mental health of young people.

# Wellness Definitions & Models

# Health as Wellness

A state of complete physical, mental, and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity (WHO, 1948).

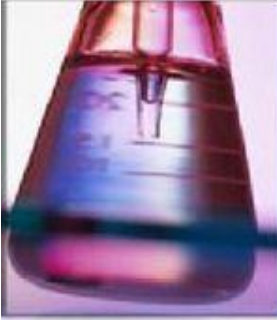
Wellness is a multi-faceted construct.

No consensus on the definition or dimensions of wellness.

# High-Level Wellness for Man & Society

- The “father” of the wellness movement (Halbert L. Dunn, 1959).
- The Health Grid

<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC1372807/?page=3>



# The Health Grid



# Role of Wellness in Substance Abuse Treatment & Recovery

- **Wellness in Drug Addiction Treatment**
- <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC9567584/>
- **Impact of Wellness on Recovery**
- <https://facesandvoicesofrecovery.org/2019/09/13/the-impact-of-wellness-on-recovery/>
- **Incorporating Wellness into Treatment**
- <https://www.ruralhealthinfo.org/toolkits/substance-abuse/4/incorporating-wellness>





# SAMHSA's Wellness Initiative

- **Definition:** Not the absence of disease, illness, and stress, but the presence of a positive purpose in life, satisfying work and play, joyful relationships, a healthy body and living environment, and happiness.
1. **Wellness Integrates Behavioral and Physical Health:** The wellness approach recognizes that the mind and body are interconnected and that behavioral health is inseparable from physical health.
  2. **Wellness Is Empowering and Prevention Oriented, Unlike the Disease Treatment Model:** This approach emphasizes having positive goals, learning self-management skills, and **developing healthy habits** (Swarbrick et al., 2011, p. 329; Swarbrick, 2014, p. 11).
  3. **Wellness Is a Journey, Not a Destination:** Wellness is a lifelong journey of striving for good mental and physical health and quality of life, to the best of a person's ability, given his or her unique circumstances.

# Bi-Directional Relationships Between Wellness & Mental Health

Substance use/misuse ↔ Mental health  
(Negative association)

Other lifestyle behaviors ↔ Mental health  
(Positive association)

# Substance Use Prevention & Early Intervention are Too Exclusionary

1. Overly focused on individual types of substance use, rather than factors influencing substance use more generally.
2. Substance use prevention and early intervention should expand to be more inclusionary in its targeting of **protective health promoting behaviors** that will advance the **wellbeing, performance, and happiness** of youth, families, and communities.

# Clustering of Lifestyle Risk Factors Among Adolescents in 89 Countries

1. 82.4% of adolescents had  $\geq 2$  risk factors, while 34.9% had  $\geq 3$ .
2. Adolescents aged 16–17 years, compared to those aged 11–13 years, had higher odds of reporting  $\geq 3$  risk factors.
3. The co-occurrence of cigarette smoking, alcohol drinking, physical inactivity, and low fruit and vegetable intake was 165% greater in females and 110% greater in males than expected.
4. Early prevention strategies targeting **clusters of lifestyle risk factors** should be prioritized to help mitigate future burden of non-communicable diseases globally.
5. *Preventive Medicine, 2020:*  
<https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S009174351930438>

# Big 3 Lifestyle Behaviors: Both Sides of the Mental Health Coin

1. **Physical Activity** (Physical activity and sports vs. Physical inactivity and excessive screen time)
2. **Diet** (Healthy breakfast and food consumption vs. Skipping breakfast and underconsumption of healthy foods)
3. **Sleep** (Adequate sleep and sleep quality vs Inadequate sleep and poor sleep quality)

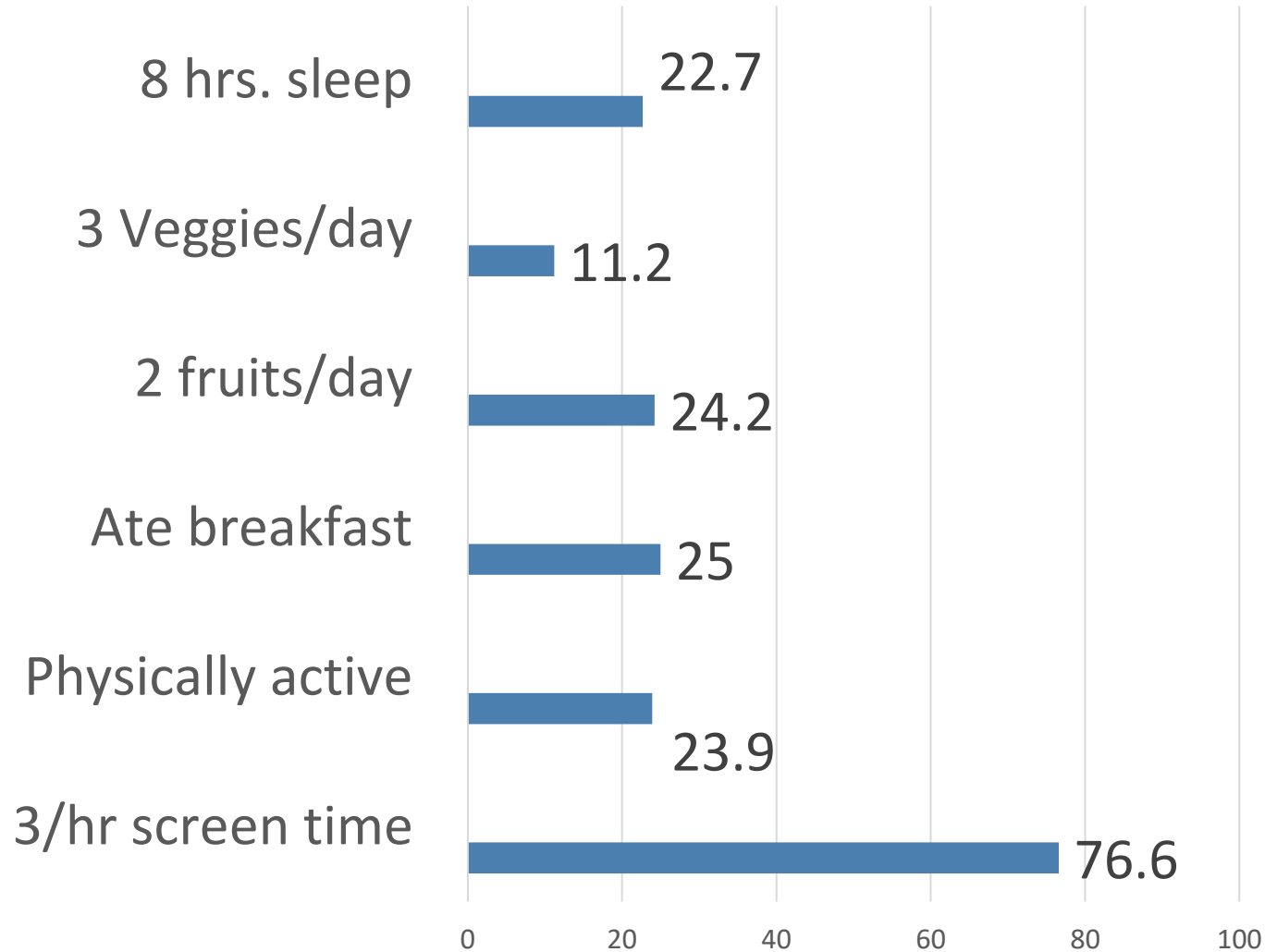


# Youth Multiple Health Behavior Guidelines

- 1) 1-hour physical activity every day
- 2) Limit recreational screen time
- 3) Healthy breakfast every day
- 4) 3 vegetable servings every day
- 5) 2 fruit servings every day
- 6) 8 hours sleep each night
- 7) Avoid alcohol & drug use
- 8) Practice a daily relaxation technique

<https://preventionpluswellness.com/pages/healthy-lifestyle-guidelines-for-youth-and-young-adult-goal-setting>

## % Behavior



HS Adolescent  
Other Lifestyle  
Risk Behaviors  
(YRBS, 2021)





# Mental Health Effects of the Big 3 Lifestyle Risk Behaviors



# Physical Inactivity and Youth Mental Health

1. Psychological distress
2. Depressive symptoms
3. Lower mental wellbeing
4. Lower life satisfaction
5. Less happiness

<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC8872491/#:~:text=Physical%20inactivity%20is%20inversely%20associated,happiness%20in%20youth%20%5B29%5D>

# Poor Eating Effects on Youth

- being overweight or obese
- tooth decay
- high blood pressure
- high cholesterol
- heart disease and stroke
- type-2 diabetes
- osteoporosis
- some cancers
- **depression**
- **eating disorders**

<https://www.sahealth.sa.gov.au/wps/wcm/connect/public+content/sa+health+internet/healthy+living/is+your+health+at+risk/the+risks+of+poor+nutrition>

# Skipping Breakfast Effects on Youth Mental Health

1. Higher risk of stress
2. Depression
3. Psychological distress
4. Anxiety in adolescents

[https://www.frontiersin.org/articles/10.3389/fnut.2022.871238/full#:~:text=In%20a%20meta%2Danalysis%20\(8,found%20similar%20findings%20\(9\).](https://www.frontiersin.org/articles/10.3389/fnut.2022.871238/full#:~:text=In%20a%20meta%2Danalysis%20(8,found%20similar%20findings%20(9).)

# Inadequate Sleep Effects on Youth

- 1. Thinking and Academic Achievement**
- 2. Emotional Health**
3. Physical Health and Development
- 4. Decision-Making and Risky Behavior**
5. Accidents and Injuries

<https://www.sleepfoundation.org/teens-and-sleep>

The background is a complex, abstract composition of overlapping, irregular shapes in various shades of green, purple, blue, and grey. Some shapes contain smaller, lighter-colored patterns, such as dots or smaller shapes, creating a layered and textured effect.

# Mental Health Benefits of the Big 3 Lifestyle Behaviors

# Benefits of Youth Sports & PA

(President's Council on Sports, Fitness & Nutrition Science Board, 2020)

[https://health.gov/sites/default/files/2020-09/YSS\\_Report\\_OnePager\\_2020-08-31\\_web.pdf](https://health.gov/sites/default/files/2020-09/YSS_Report_OnePager_2020-08-31_web.pdf)

# Mental, Emotional & Social Benefits

- 1. Lower rates of anxiety and depression**
- 2. Lower amounts of stress**
- 3. Higher self-esteem and confidence**
- 4. Reduced risk of suicide**
- 5. Less substance abuse and fewer risky behaviors**
- 6. Increased cognitive performance**
- 7. Increased creativity**
- 8. Greater enjoyment of all forms of physical activity**
- 9. Improved psychological and emotional well-being for individuals with disabilities**
- 10. Increased life satisfaction**



# Benefits of Youth Healthy Eating

(CDC Healthy Schools)

<https://www.cdc.gov/healthyschools/nutrition/facts.htm>

(Academy of Nutrition &  
Dietetics, 2021)

<https://www.eatright.org/food/nutrition/healthy-eating/5-reasons-your-teen-needs-breakfast>



# Mental Health Benefits of Eating Breakfast

- 1. Energy: Along with sleep and exercise,** breakfast is one of the best ways to recharge your batteries and avoid mood swings.
- 2. Improved Concentration:** Studies suggest that eating a nutritious breakfast **improves brain function — particularly memory and recall.**
- 3. Better Grades:** Research shows students who eat breakfast perform better **academically which can impact self-esteem and self-efficacy.**
- 4. Healthy Choices:** Those who eat a morning meal tend to **make healthier food choices throughout the day,** which can positively impact long-term health.

# Benefits of Youth Sleep

(Sleep Foundation, 2022)

<https://www.sleepfoundation.org/teens-and-sleep>



# Mental Health Benefits of Sleep

1. **Thinking and Academic Achievement:** Sleep benefits the **brain and promotes attention, memory, and analytical thought.**
2. **Emotional Health:** Most people have experienced how sleep can affect **mood, causing irritability and exaggerated emotional reactions.**
3. **Physical Health and Development:** Sleep contributes to the **effective function of virtually every system** of the body including the brain.
4. **Decision-Making and Risky Behavior:** Sleep deprivation can affect the development of the **frontal lobe**, a part of the brain that is critical to control impulsive behavior.



## 2 Strategies for Integrating Prevention, Early Intervention & Wellness

- 1. The Piecemeal Approach**
  - a. Implement individual programs, campaigns and strategies to prevent SU & increase single health behaviors.
  - b. Very costly in time and dollars.
  - c. Status quo & least holistic & comprehensive.

2 Strategies  
for Integrating  
Prevention,  
Early  
Intervention &  
Wellness

## 2. The Integrated Approach

- a. Implement programs, campaigns and strategies that integrates SU prevention and intervention with wellness behavior promotion.
- b. Most cost-effective, integrated & holistic.
- c. But how???



## 4-Step Evidence-Based Model for Integrating SUP/I & Wellness to Strengthen Mental Health

- 1. Screening:** Identify youth at risk AND Increase behavioral reflection
  - 2. Prevention + Intervention Feedback:** Integrate & motivate behavior change to prevent & reduce SU and promote healthy behaviors **for all youth**
  - 3. Goal Setting:** Initiate **multiple behavior** change **for all youth**
  - 4. Follow-up:** Referral to treatment AND Promote continued goal setting **for all youth**
- This model has been used to create two evidence-based screening and brief interventions (i.e., SPORT Prevention Plus Wellness for youth and InShape Prevention Plus Wellness for young adults, and numerous other programs for youth, adults, parents and media campaigns)
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# Step 1: Use Screening To ID Youth SU Risk Level AND Increase Health Behavior Reflection



1. Reflecting upon one's health behaviors is the **first step in changing personal habits.**
2. Assessing which substance use and healthy behaviors you are currently engaged in is essential for **increasing awareness of your health risks and strengths.**
3. **Thinking about specific steps you can take to improve each of your health behaviors** is a necessary first step in setting goals to improve your habits.
4. Using **screening surveys or asking questions** is a great way to enhance reflection on one's health behaviors.



# Screening Surveys & Questions



- Screening questions to increase reflection:
  1. Do you usually get 1 hour or more of PA every day?
  2. Do you sleep 8 or more hours most evenings?
  3. Do you eat breakfast most days a week?
- Additional reflection questions placed throughout feedback, e.g., What types of PA do you like or think you'd like to try in the future?
- Validated screeners, e.g., CRAFFT or S2BI

# Step #2a: Positive Feedback and Highlight Benefits of Healthy Behaviors, Especially Positive Future Images for All Youth

1. Providing **positive feedback tailored** to individual current health behaviors may increase efficacy.
2. Identifying the **benefits of engaging in each healthy behavior will increase positive expectancies** which in turn increases motivation to participate in those behaviors.
3. **Positive future images, as well as images of peers engaging in specific healthy habits are associated with one's personal identity** and are desirable outcomes that **hold particular motivational strength**.
4. Unconscious positive future images associated with engaging in healthy behaviors **can be cued using image terms and illustrations**, unleashing their motivational force.

# Step #2b: Feedback Illustrating How Substance Use Harms Healthy Habits & Benefits for All Youth

1. **Linking how specific substance use harms or interferes with achieving healthy behaviors is key to addressing multiple health risks within a single SBIRT or program.**
2. These messages should **also illustrate how substance use sabotages achieving the positive benefits and desired future images** associated with participating in specific healthy habits.
3. These messages should demonstrate how using alcohol, e-cigarettes, cannabis, or opioids, for example, counteract the beneficial effects of healthy behaviors and **prevents one from reaching desired goals in life.**

Step #2c:  
Feedback  
Addressing  
Other Known  
Risk Factors  
For  
Substance  
Use for All  
Youth

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In addition to linking specific substance use to healthy behaviors, it's important to **target other known risk factors for using substance use** to strengthen brief multiple behavior interventions.

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These risk factors include **perceived harmfulness of using substances, social norms, drug myths, resistance skills, environmental influences, and healthy alternatives** to using substances.



## Step #3: Multiple Health Behavior Goal Plan for All Youth

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1. Setting goals, particularly **short-term goals**, is essential to **initiating and achieving behavior change**, as well as **developing self-regulation skills and self-efficacy**.
2. Goals should be **specific**, that is **measurable**, as well as **achievable**.
3. **Multiple behavior goals** should be set to **prevent substance use while increasing one or more healthy lifestyle behaviors**.
4. Build in **contract co-signatures** and **calendar logs** to enhance motivation and monitoring.

# Step #4: Referral to Treatment AND Follow-up To Promote Continued Goal Setting & Monitoring for All Youth

The more youth set, monitor and achieve short-term goals the more they will increase their self-regulation skills and self-efficacy.

**Following-up to remind youth to keep resetting goals every week** is key to them achieving long-term goals resulting in improved physical and mental wellness.

# Conclusions

1. Wellness is associated with less SU and better mental health while prevention and intervention is too exclusively focused only on individual SU behaviors.
2. The Big 3 wellness-promoting lifestyle behaviors are associated with mental health protection and promotion and less SU.
3. A 4-step evidence-based model can be used to holistically integrate substance use prevention and intervention with wellness for enhancing the mental health of young people.

For more information...

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- **Learn more about Prevention Plus Wellness Brief Interventions:**  
<https://preventionpluswellness.com/blogs/news/sport-alcohol-drug-prevention-plus-wellness-brief-interventions>



# Professional Reflection/Homework

- **List 3 concrete actions** you can take to integrate wellness (i.e., healthy lifestyle behavior) promotion into your prevention or intervention practice for enhancing the mental health of youth in your region.



