



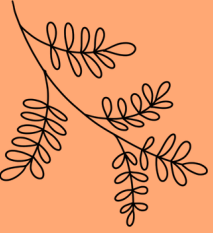
# The Well-being Guide

Center for  
**healthyminds**  
UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN-MADISON

# Contents

1. Let's Talk Health	Pg 1
2. What to Ask Yourself	Pg 2
3. The Basics	Pg 3
4. ACIP and 'Holistic Health'	Pgs 4-6
5. Resources	Pgs 7-10
6. Sources	Pg 11





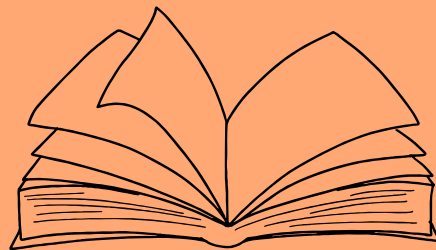
# Let's Talk Health

Health is defined as ‘*a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being.*’ It can be considered one of the most important aspects of human life, yet is consistently overlooked for values like productivity or social image.

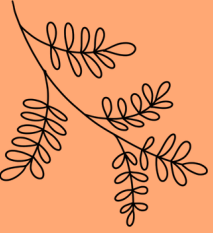
Taking care of your physical and mental well-being can be difficult and sometimes overwhelming. We hope this guide can help bring you one step closer to holistic health. We intend for this guide to provide clarity and to educate.

First, we ask you to question your own well-being status through a series of curated questions. You can then explore a list of essential scientific concepts about the human body, learn about the Center for Healthy Minds well-being framework (Awareness, Connection, Insight and Purpose (ACIP), and understand some important holistic health concepts. We also include well-being resources relevant to the ideas introduced throughout the guide.

Note: Sources for scientific content can be found at the end of the guide.

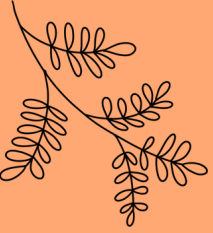


Please note that this guide is not meant to be a replacement for healthcare or medical advice. If you are concerned about something, always reach out to a professional.



# What to Ask Yourself

- 1. Do I eat three well-balanced meals a day?
- 2. Do I have healthy bowel movements on a regular basis?
- 3. Do I intentionally prioritize my sleep over other activities?
- 4. Do I have a routine or specific steps I follow to prepare myself for sleep?
- 5. Do I take time out of my week to engage in a healthy activity I am interested in?
- 6. Do I consume caffeine daily, or drink alcohol or use drugs more than once a week?
- 7. Do I exercise (weight-lifting, cardio, pilates, yoga, mobility stretching, sports, etc) at least 3-4 times a week?
- 8. Do I feel fatigued, stressed, or restless at this very moment? How often do I feel this way, say weekly?
- 9. How often do I take a moment to check in with myself during the day (assessing my emotions or where I'm tense in my body)?
- 10. Do I take the time out of my day to slow down or take a breath?
- 11. Do I make time to socialize or spend time with people I care about daily?
- 12. Am I fully present when I'm around other people?
- 13. When was the last time I reached out to a loved one and expressed what they mean to me?
- 14. When things feel overwhelming, do I have tools to recenter myself?



# The Basics

Let's explore some of the scientific concepts within well-being.

**The Nervous System:** A network between the brain, spinal cord, and other muscles and organs. It transmits signals and is responsible for processing sensory information, coordinating body functions, and regulating mood, anxiety, and other emotional responses.<sup>(1)</sup>

**The Central-Executive Network:** A neural network in the brain responsible for attention, self-awareness, and emotion regulation. It helps us maintain focus, notice our thoughts and feelings, and regulate our responses to our surroundings.<sup>(2)</sup>

**The Endocrine System:** Consists of hormones and glands that control metabolism and mood regulation. Two of these glands that are more commonly known are the adrenal glands. In women, the endocrine system also includes the ovaries.<sup>(3)</sup>

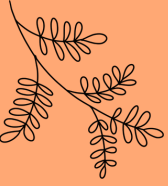
**Gut-Brain Axis:** This is the bidirectional communication that occurs between the digestive system and the brain. The gut is often referred to as the "second brain" of the body, and thus influences mood, immune function, and mental health.<sup>(4)</sup>

**Circadian Rhythm:** The 24-hour cycle in which humans sleep, wake, eat, and release hormones. The rhythm is largely influenced by light exposure. Disruptions to circadian rhythm can cause insomnia, fatigue, and mood disorders.<sup>(5)</sup>

**Social Neuroscience:** How social interactions and relationships impact brain function and overall well-being.<sup>(6)</sup>

**Neuroplasticity:** The brain's ability to change and adapt. It involves forming new neural connections and strengthening or weakening existing ones and is important for learning resilience and mental health.<sup>(7)</sup>

**Mind-Body Connection:** Interdependence between mental and physical health, demonstrating how psychological states affect physiological processes, and vice versa.<sup>(8)</sup>



# ACIP and ‘Holistic Health’

We will now introduce you to the Awareness, Connection, Insight, and Purpose framework (ACIP) — a well-being framework rooted in well-being research, cognitive and affective neuroscience, and clinical psychology.

Awareness: A heightened attentiveness to both external perceptions and internal cues, allowing us to be fully present in our experiences.

- Staying mindful of body signals
- Being conscious of the present
- Recognizing emotional states of others and ourselves
- Understanding daily energy patterns

Connection: Our care toward others that promotes supportive relationships and healthy interactions, often shaped by how we perceive and engage with people around us.

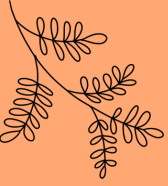
- Social bonds and support systems
- Mind-body integration
- Engaging with our communities

Insight: Knowledge about how our emotions, thoughts, beliefs, and other factors shape our subjective experience and sense of self.

- Understanding personal patterns
- Recognizing triggers and responses
- Self-inquiry, aka the investigation of our beliefs regarding ourselves

Purpose: Clarity about personal aims and values that we can actively recall in daily life, applying meaning to our various pursuits.

- Maintaining values, which are embodied in specific, pragmatic ways
- Maintaining aims, which are more aspirational



# ACIP and ‘Holistic Health’

Certain concepts are not explicitly included in the ACIP framework, such as nutrition, sleep cycles, and more. These concepts and the ACIP framework work in tandem to form the foundations of holistic health. But what do we mean by that?

‘Holistic health’ is referred to as *the form of healing which addresses the physical, mental, emotional, and social components of health*.

Let’s dive into some of these practices and learn about why they are so important!

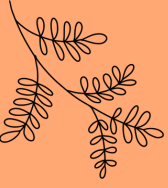
**We Are What We Eat:** Nutrition is vital for not only physical but also mental well-being, as seen through the gut-brain axis. In fact, many studies have found that psychological approaches lead to greater improvement in digestive symptoms compared to only medical treatment. But don’t forget — every body is different, so nutrition looks different for each individual person!

If you are concerned about your eating habits, we advise you to reach out to the nutrition team at University Health Services, or check for registered dietitians covered under your insurance. If you have suspicions about your gut health or GI disorders, take a look at the other resources we have listed under ‘We are What We Eat’ in the resources section!

**Rest is Best:** Sleep is often another aspect of daily life people easily sacrifice. You’ve likely been told before that adequate sleep is essential for cognitive function and emotional regulation. But did you know that women need 1-2 more hours of sleep on average than men? Or that an imbalanced sleep schedule means a disrupted circadian rhythm, which is associated with heart disease, diabetes, and Alzheimer’s?

Sleep should be a priority, and there are numerous resources out there to help restore your circadian rhythm, should you need to. We have included some in the Resources section. We've also included information on sleep studies, in case you're concerned that your sleep patterns (insomnia, hypnic jerks, etc) might require medical attention.





# ACIP and ‘Holistic Health’

**Slow your Roll:** Slowing down is not a common practice in our hyper-active world. Corporate culture, a general societal emphasis on productivity and efficiency, and the intensive demands of every-day life make it difficult to remind ourselves to take a breather. But more research has emerged over the last two decades proving that slowing down has numerous health benefits. It is proven to be one of the best ways to regulate the nervous system. This means being intentional about tasks that you may have never taken time to consider before, such as walking, breathing, or chewing your food. Slowing down can also be considered one of the best ways to remain ‘aware’ according to the ACIP framework.

Under ‘Slow Your Roll,’ you’ll find accredited apps for guided meditations and other resources that offer practical tips for building this important habit.

**Balance is Key:** Research shows that maintaining balance across different life domains, including work, relationships, personal growth, and play, significantly impacts our overall well-being. In fact, people who maintain diverse activities and prioritize balance often show greater resilience to stress and cognitive decline later in life. Balance isn’t just equilibrium in all aspects of life, but rather about discovering a sustainable rhythm that works for you. This also includes being mindful of habits or activities you know may impact you negatively, and ensuring you aren’t partaking in them too often.

Our resources under ‘Balance is Key’ offer practical tools, books, workshops, and strategies for creating a balanced lifestyle that works best for you.





# Resources

or visit

<https://www.healthymindsuw.com/resources.html>

## **Awareness:**

1. Explore resources by the Center for Healthy Minds [here](#) and download The Healthy Minds Innovation's [mindfulness app](#)!
2. Interested in why mindfulness and intention change our brains? Check out [this paper](#).
3. The Center for Healthy Minds' founder, Dr. Richard J. Davidson, has [a famous ted talk](#) about neuroplasticity and mindfulness and their potential to change one's emotions and relationships for the better.
4. Are you interested in the science of mindfulness? You might be wondering - what does awareness actually do for our brains? [Read more here](#).
5. Take a 3-minute break when you're studying to practice awareness skills. First notice things you hear in your environment, then notice things you see in your environment, then notice anything that might be happening in your body. While doing the practice, see if you can invite a welcoming attitude towards whatever you're noticing.

## **Connection:**

1. Discover wholehearted Living—a way of engaging with the world from a place of worthiness—with [Gifts of Imperfection by Dr. Brené Brown](#)
2. Watch John Cacioppo's famous Ted Talk [here](#) to further understand why loneliness is so dangerous.
3. Find organizations and clubs on campus that interest you through [the Wisconsin Involvement Network](#).
4. Passionate about pottery or interested in meeting people who enjoy art? The Wisconsin Union hosts [Free Art Fridays](#) — get creative at no cost!
5. Next time you're in line for coffee or waiting for a lecture to start, spend a few minutes noticing the people around you. Strike up a conversation with someone! As you do this, tune into your body and see if any positive sensations arise.



# Resources



## Insight:

1. Understand how our views toward money and self-worth can either lead to living a life of scarcity or abundance with Lynne Twist’s book, The Soul of Money.
2. Art has long served as a source of therapy, offering people a pathway to peace of mind. The Chazen Art Museum, centrally located on campus and free for everyone, provides a perfect setting for such reflection and tranquility.
3. Understanding one’s values is a critical step towards understanding oneself better. Here is an exercise that might help whittle down your core values.
4. Self-awareness is a skill that requires cultivation. If you find yourself struggling to be self aware, here are some tools and activities that might help.
5. Journaling is a great way to reflect on your views and values.
6. Learn how to start journaling.
  - a. Prompt ideas:
    - i. If you could give your younger self one piece of advice, what would it be?
    - ii. How are you feeling right now? Describe it in detail. Use adjectives that describe both your physical and emotional state.
    - iii. What does your ideal day look like?
    - iv. Write about a person who has positively impacted your life.
7. Find a quiet place and take a few minutes to pause and notice your thoughts. Do your thoughts tend to show up as mental images, mental talk, or a combination of the two? Notice how your thoughts may be influencing your present moment experience—both in positive and negative ways. Notice how quickly thoughts appear, change, and disappear. See if you can approach this whole exercise with curiosity—there is no “correct” experience to have. We’re practicing investigating our first-person experience like a scientist.

## **Purpose:**

1. Learn about the science of intention in relation to our goals in life with [The Source by Dr. Tara Swart](#)
2. The Morgridge Center for Public Service offers [opportunities for civic engagement](#) around the Madison area, which could be a great way to find purpose in helping the community.
3. You can also search for opportunities at these non-profit organizations:
  - a. Food pantries - Goodman Community Center, The River Food Pantry
  - b. Animal shelters - Dane County Humane Society, Madison Cat Project
  - c. Hospitals and healthcare facilities - UW Health, SSM Health
  - d. Environmental organizations - Clean Lakes Alliance, Urban Tree Alliance
  - e. Homeless shelters - The Salvation Army, Porchlight
4. Before starting an activity, reflect on how your core values may be connected to what you're about to do. Summarize your thoughts in a note on your phone!

## **We are What we Eat (and think!):**

1. Learn about the microbiome through a [master class](#) by some of the world's leading gut health experts.
2. Did you know the gut and the mind are connected? If you're facing anxiety or depression, it may be affecting your GI tract. Learn more [here](#).
3. If you're concerned you may have food intolerances, or that certain foods are the source of your stomach pain, learn more about [the Whole30 diet](#) or [the AIP diet](#).
4. Read UW-Madison's [Well-being Tips on Nutrition guide here](#).
5. Get in touch with the [UHS Nutrition team](#), or call for appointments: 608-265-5600

## **Rest is Best:**

1. Did you know sleep deprivation increases your chances of developing Alzheimer's? [Read more here](#).
2. Think you need a sleep study done or concerned about your sleeping habits? Check out [this video](#). Find sleep centers near you by contacting your insurance provider or checking for centers [through this link](#).
3. Make sure to limit the duration and frequency of your naps! [Here's a great article](#) explaining why.
4. Learn about deep rest with the "[Power of Deep Rest](#)" article by the University of California college system.
5. Dr. Andrew Huberman explains the importance of light for your circadian rhythm in [this episode of his podcast](#).

## **Slow your Roll:**

1. Healthy Minds on Campus places a significant emphasis on slowing down through our events. Stay updated about which events are coming up through our [GroupMe](#) or [Instagram page](#)!
2. [Follow a guided meditation](#) with Dr. Richard Davidson to slow down and take a moment for yourself today.
3. Phil Powers from the American Alpine club talks about the [practice of slowing down](#). He explains how his experience in learning to regulate his pace brought him to new heights!
4. “The art of doing less” is a recorded mindfulness practice in the [Healthy Minds Program app](#) that talks about the benefits of slowing down.
5. [Redefining rest](#) is a Ted Talk by entrepreneur Bec Heinrich that discusses slowing down can accelerate productivity.

## **Balance is Key:**

1. Learn about the interactions of alcohol and the brain [here](#).
2. Is red wine good for your heart? [Harvard Health debunks this common myth](#).
3. Keep an eye out for fitness and outdoor events hosted by UW-Madison through [their events calendar](#).
4. What exactly is resilience? Is it the ability to build a tolerance against hardships? Not quite. [Read more here](#).
5. Part of finding balance is organizing your activities in a way that works best for you. Here’s a list of life management and productivity tools to help you structure your tasks:
  - a. Google Calendar
  - b. Notion
  - c. Microsoft To Do
  - d. Evernote
  - e. Habitica
  - f. Calm



# Sources

- <https://qbi.uq.edu.au/brain/brain-anatomy/peripheral-nervous-system>
- [https://e80933c4-1936-483b-a2d3-026d9c0fe05d.filesusr.com/ugd/82b42b\\_647b13ccc6e1402aad8a4b4d0e3f8026.pdf](https://e80933c4-1936-483b-a2d3-026d9c0fe05d.filesusr.com/ugd/82b42b_647b13ccc6e1402aad8a4b4d0e3f8026.pdf)
- <https://www.endocrine.org/patient-engagement/endocrine-library>
- <https://www.hopkinsmedicine.org/health/wellness-and-prevention/the-brain-gut-connection>
- <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/1510329/>
- <https://www.nature.com/articles/nn.3093>
- <https://www.sleepfoundation.org/circadian-rhythm>
- <https://www.nccih.nih.gov/health/providers/digest/mind-and-body-approaches-for-stress>

