How to build your wellness plan

What is a wellness plan, and why should we want to build one? The answer to these questions actually has to come from how you feel about yourself and what you want to achieve to feel good in your own skin.

There is lots of expert advice out there for you to find at the click of a mouse or a swipe of the finger. That advice can motivate you, or it may make you want to keep swiping. The concept of wellness is so broad there is not one right answer.

But having a little structure never hurts, so here are a few steps you can consider when you feel ready to take on a wellness plan:

**Be clear on your why**

Why do you want to change? What would your before-and-after picture look like? And what would be different about your daily routine, relationships, and the way you feel and act if you could reduce the obstacles hindering your wellness today?

Motivation to change usually happens when the pain or frustration you feel of staying the same is greater than it would be to change. You need to be crystal-clear and believe the benefits you foresee happening.

**Identify your goals**

What problems do you want to solve? Many wellness experts suggest making a specific, measurable list of at least three things you want to change in your life, like lowering your weight by so many pounds, or increasing your amount of sleep per night by one extra hour. But keep in mind this goal should be achievable and workable.

**Track your progress**

As the old adage goes, “you can’t manage what you can’t measure”. Be sure to track your progress along the way. There are many fitness apps out there that can help you with this, so find the one that suits you best. But keep in mind the process may mean one step forward and two steps back for the first while. That’s okay – think of the step forward and keep pushing ahead.

**Aim for steady, incremental growth**

Change takes time, and sustainable results require change that’s also sustained long-term. Be mindful that, when making a change, your body may go through an uncomfortable transition or detox. Don’t give up yet. You’ll get through it. As your body adapts, aim for steady, incremental growth, and watch small changes snowball into big benefits.
How to stop the flu from spreading through your home

Staying flu-free is no easy task, especially when you have a house full of kids. Prevention is always the best strategy, and that starts by getting an annual flu shot. But if a family member does fall ill, following a few precautions could reduce the spread, so you can stay healthy while you care for your family.

Here are some simple infection control procedures you can use to stop the flu from spreading:

**Assign a single caregiver**

Your flu-stricken family member will need lots of care, but every foray into the infection zone gives the infection a chance to spread. To reduce the risk, assign a single caregiver, then implement strict infection control measures.

Start by keeping a supply of alcohol-infused wipes to disinfect any surfaces the sick family member, or assigned caregiver, touches. Be sure to wipe down doorknobs, desks, tables and any other surface in the exposed area. Wash hands thoroughly with soap and water before and after any contact with sick person.

**Do not move objects from the “Quarantine” zone**

It may not be a full-fledged quarantine, but the sickroom should still be treated with care. Avoid moving any objects, including pens, plates, eating utensils or anything else the infected family member touches.

**Disinfect your laundry**

You will probably need to do some laundry for your sick family member, and how you handle those soiled linens and dirty clothes matters. Placing the items in plastic bags and sealing them tightly is a good first step, so keep a supply on hand.

According to an article “10 Bad Laundry Myths Debunked” found at thespruce.com, using hot water alone for laundry does not kill all germs and bacteria. Washing clothing or linens for laundry does not kill all germs and bacteria. Washing clothing or linens in a washer.

Do not use hot water alone for laundry. Only a disinfectant like chlorine bleach, pine oil, or a phenolic disinfectant will sanitize the laundry. The spruce.com, using hot water alone for laundry does not kill all germs and bacteria. Washing clothing or linens in a washer.

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Five steps to properly tracking calories

Being able to determine how many calories you are taking in is a useful skill to have. Tracking your calories for a day or week might reveal that you are consuming a lot more than you thought, allowing you to modify your eating habits. Here are five steps to properly tracking your calorie intake:

1. **Check labels closely.**
   The most basic aspect of tracking calories is collecting information off of nutrition labels. You must take care to read labels correctly. Pay attention to what serving size is listed. Nutrition labels will sometimes use strange serving sizes, particularly when trying to make an unhealthy item appear more nutritious.

2. **Measure.**
   Once you know how many calories a food product has, you need to determine how much of it you are actually eating. Scales and measuring cups are the best way to perform this measurement. While using scales and measuring cups can be time-consuming and annoying, as you become more experienced with calorie counting you will learn to make accurate estimates on your own.

3. **Use an app.**
   There are a wide variety of calorie tracking apps out there. While not absolutely essential for counting calories, these apps do have useful features. A typical calorie counting app will feature a simple system for you to log everything you eat. Apps provide an easy means to look back at your calorie intake for previous days and weeks. Using an app may increase motivation as well.

4. **Be honest.**
   If you ate an unhealthy snack, the temptation is to not count those calories. Don’t lie to yourself! The whole point of tracking your calories is to improve your eating habits.

5. **Make better choices.**
   The information provided by calorie tracking is only useful if you actually act on it. Analyze the data you’ve collected and determine where you need to improve. Set a specific calorie limit for each day if that’s what is necessary.
High blood pressure, or hypertension, affects more than one in five adults in Canada. It’s the most common reason to visit a doctor, resulting in over 21 million physician visits a year in Canada, according to the Public Health Agency of Canada (PHAC). Hypertension is also the number one reason for taking medication.

If detected, high blood pressure can be controlled with some of the following lifestyle changes, medication, or both:

1. **Consume less salt.**
   High amounts of sodium are found in many types of convenience and snack foods, and smoked, salted, cured or canned meats and fish. Eat less of these foods and use less salt in cooking or at the table, says the Heart and Stroke Foundation of Canada, which recommends eating less than 1 tsp. of salt a day in total.

2. **Eat healthy foods.**
   A diet low in salt and saturated fats can make a big difference. Eat more vegetables and fruits, low-fat dairy products, lean meats, fish, beans, nuts, seeds and whole grains.

3. **Be physically active each day.**
   Regular walks or any other physical activity you enjoy can have a positive impact on blood pressure and stress.

4. **Maintain a healthy body weight.**
   Losing only five pounds, if you’re overweight, can help lower your blood pressure, says Mayo Clinic.

5. **Drink moderately.**
   Limit alcohol intake to 1 to 2 standard drinks a day or less, such as a regular-sized glass of wine or beer, says PHAC. Drinking more than that can raise blood pressure and reduce the effectiveness of blood pressure medications.

6. **Manage stress.**
   Practice stress-reduction techniques such as muscle relaxation, deep breathing, meditation or tai chi.

7. **Take medication as prescribed.**
   Making lifestyle changes at the same time can reduce the dosage or number of medications needed to control blood pressure in some cases.

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**Do you know what’s in the air you breathe?**

(NC) Most of us don’t give our indoor air much thought until we find ourselves in a hot, stuffy, crowded room with no easy escape. But it’s important to give it some thought, especially when it comes to the air in your home.

Ventilation can help improve indoor air quality by removing pollutants from the home and by bringing in fresh air from outside. This is especially important when renovating or when using chemical products.

In your home, there are two types of ventilation. Natural ventilation is when air moves between inside and outside through open windows, doors, chimneys, vents or cracks in the walls. An older, draftier home may have higher natural ventilation rates than new homes that are tightly built to comply with current codes and standards.

Mechanical ventilation refers to air flows created by fans, ducts and designed openings in the house. This includes kitchen and bathroom fans, as well as more complicated systems such as heat recovery ventilators (HRVs) or energy recovery ventilators (ERVs).

To ensure you maintain good indoor air quality, proper ventilation is key. Spring, summer, winter or fall, be sure to follow these simple steps so you and your family can continue to breathe easy:

- Open windows, when possible.
- Let bathroom fans run during and after showering or bathing.
- Run your kitchen fan when cooking.
- Set your mechanical ventilation system to a higher setting, letting it run longer, or, if necessary, have your ventilation system checked by a qualified ventilation contractor.
- Install a fresh air duct into your forced-air furnace, which may help bring in fresh air whenever it runs.
- Use an HRV or an ERV if you have one, or retrofit one into your home.
- Use your furnace fan or, if necessary, a separate fan or air supply to make sure air is distributed throughout the home.
Build up your self-confidence

Feeling a little down on yourself? Said “sorry” one too many times today? Canadians may like to apologize a lot but when it starts to eat away at your self-confidence, it’s time to stop saying sorry and pick yourself up. Here are a few ways to do just that:

1. Cut the negative self-talk
No one ever got better at anything by beating themselves up. Talk to yourself kindly, and encouragingly, rather than yelling at yourself in the mirror for making mistakes. A positive mindset will help you learn more easily, which will boost confidence.

2. Boost your knowledge
The more you know, the more you grow. Sounds cliche, but it’s a fact. Read up on the latest research to enhance your knowledge. Knowing how and why certain practices and processes work can boost confidence in your ability to do them.

3. Build on your strengths
Studies have shown that a good way to boost confidence is to focus on your strengths rather than your weaknesses. Accept what you already do well, and make an effort to refine your better qualities. It’s a great confidence boost to do something excellently rather than adequately. And remember, you have strengths. Don’t let yourself forget that. For example, if you show up for work and meetings on time, and you are never late, that is a definite strength.

4. Pick up new skills
There is always room for improvement, and learning new skills will not only enhance proficiency at your job, but will also boost confidence. Watch what other people do successfully, and copy how they do it. Attend seminars designed to help you hone your skills and become a better worker. Pick useful skills such as time management, customer service, and productivity, or learn something new that will help specifically with your job.

5. Ask questions
Never be afraid to ask questions when you don’t know something. Doing a task incorrectly because you don’t fully understand it is not a good way to boost confidence. If you’re ever unsure of how something should be done, ask someone else what you need to do. Additionally, don’t go about a project without fully understanding it. To ask for clarification of what precisely is required is not a sign of weakness or low self esteem. It’s a sign you want to get things right - and that’s a strength.

You have got what it takes. If you don’t believe in yourself, who will?

Are your soap, shampoo and cosmetics safe?

(NC) Soap, moisturizing creams, shampoo, deodorant and cosmetics are a part of everyone’s life. Without thinking twice, most of us use these products every single day. Most are safe, but they can sometimes cause health problems, like allergic reactions and skin irritation.

By thinking twice and following these tips, we can protect ourselves and those around us:

- Check the container for safety information, including hazard symbols.
- Always read and follow directions carefully. Misuse of a product can lead to problems like rashes, burns or eye damage.
- Don’t spray cosmetics near a flame or source of heat. This can cause fires or explosions.
- Keep cosmetic products out of the reach of children. If a child swallows a cosmetic, contact the nearest poison control centre. You can find the number on the first page of your telephone book or call 411.
- Most cosmetics contain preservatives. These important ingredients help keep bacteria from growing in the product.
- Keep your cosmetics clean by washing your hands before putting on makeup. Avoid sharing makeup and do not add water or saliva to dilute it.
- Keep cosmetics in a dry area, away from direct heat and sunlight.
- Do not use a cosmetic if it changes in smell, colour or texture.
- A product labelled “hypoallergenic” can still cause allergic reactions. Hypoallergenic simply means that the product is less likely to cause allergic reactions.
- Be careful of unrealistic or exaggerated manufacturer claims on any product, especially if they suggest major or permanent changes to your body or skin structure. If the product has a therapeutic effect on your body, like treating a disorder or skin condition, it is considered a drug or natural health product and should have a Drug Identification Number (DIN) or a Natural Health Product Number (NPN) on the label.
Cooking myths debunked

Sometimes that kitchen ritual that you swear by might actually not be true. Here are two popular cooking myths debunked:

1. All foods can be preserved in the fridge

It’s a common belief that when in doubt, storing food in the fridge is best. But it’s not the best place for everything — bread and other baked goods go stale faster at fridge temperature than at room temperature, which is why bread boxes exist to hide loaves away on the countertop. Even cakes are best stored at room temperature for four to five days — cover them with a cake dome. And while icing provides a perfect seal, you could press some plastic or beeswax wrap against any cut sides to prevent it from drying out faster. But if they have a fruit or cream filling or topping, keep them in the fridge.

2. When you add beer or wine, the alcohol cooks off

The theory here is that since alcohol boils at a lower temperature than water (78 C/173 F versus 100 C/212 F), it will evaporate first, before any water does. In fact, it doesn’t all cook off, and the amount that does cook off depends on what you’re cooking and how long you’re cooking it, and even factors like ingredient density and surface area make a difference. So a flambé made with something high-proof cooked quickly will retain much more booze than a long simmered beef bourguignon.

A 2003 study by the USDA Nutrient Data Laboratory determined that the amount of alcohol left in a dish ranges from five to 85 per cent — the lowest are those dishes measured after 2 hours of cooking time.

Tips for adopting a vegan lifestyle

(V) Veganism is a diet and lifestyle that has received a lot of coverage lately. According to research from Dalhousie University, there are 2.3 million vegetarians in Canada, up from 900,000 15 years ago. Another 850,000 people consider themselves vegan. Those two numbers add up to 9.4 per cent of the population.

If you’re considering a transition to veganism, here are a few things you can do to incorporate animal-free alternatives into your lifestyle.

Slowly swap your diet.

When making a change, especially to your diet, it’s important you start slowly. It takes time for your body to adjust to new eating habits. Consider adding to your diet before subtracting from it. By adding more whole grains, beans, legumes, nuts, seeds and vegetables, your body will grow accustomed to them and the removal of animal products won’t be as noticeable.

Cook at home.

Cooking your meals at home is the easiest way to ensure you are sticking to the vegan diet. When eating out, you can’t always be sure that the meal is completely vegan. Many cuisines include cheese, butter or eggs, and there isn’t always a replacement available. Cooking your own meals at home puts you in control, and it’s usually cheaper and healthier than restaurant meals too.

Look for no animal products or by-products.

Veganism is about more than changing your diet. It also means changing the products you use. Instead of replacing everything at once, start with simple items that are made with effective, plant-based ingredients. Look for products that aren’t tested on animals. If this step seems a little too big for you, take your time with it. Changing your diet is an important first step in adopting a vegan lifestyle. You can work on other aspects at your own pace.

Vegan superfoods

Here are two vegan superfoods to help you power through your day!

**Kiwi fruit**

The kiwifruit, which is technically a berry, could make your skin brighter and help you sleep better. Its consumption is linked with a reduced risk of heart disease, diabetes, and cancer, and could also help to lower blood pressure and manage bowel movements.

Buy them fresh from your local farmer’s market, enjoy as a juice, or include kiwifruit in a fruit salad, acai bowl, or alongside some vegan pancakes.

**Brazil nuts**

Brazil nuts are rich in monounsaturated fat, which is a good fat, according to BBC Good Food. Eating them also provides protein and nutrients like zinc, magnesium, vitamin E, calcium, and B vitamins. Brazil nuts are the richest known source for the important nutrient selenium, essential for a healthy immune system, helping to prevent nerve and cell damage. Five or six Brazil nuts each day meets the recommended daily allowance of selenium.