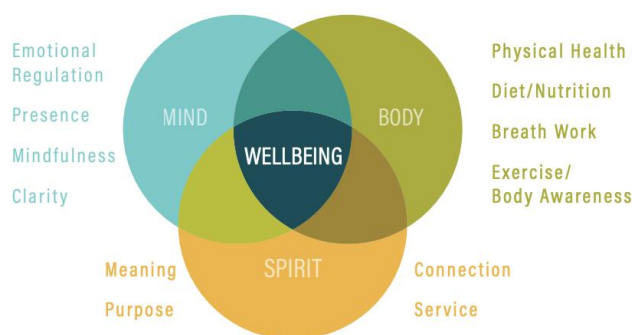


THE SCIENCE BEHIND WELLBEING

What Is Wellbeing?

Wellbeing is the state of holistic health, driven by a person's activities, choices, and lifestyles¹ and sustained over time.²

Years of scientific research support the impact of **mind, body and spirit** on wellbeing, and the interconnectedness of these three elements. A healthy life is a life grounded in wellbeing – which is why the World Health Organization (WHO) defines health as a “complete state of physical, mental and social wellbeing, and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity.”³



What Wellbeing Isn't

It is important to distinguish “wellbeing” from “wellness” – which is typically associated with physical health. Additionally, wellbeing is often confused with happiness. Happiness can be considered a component of wellbeing, but happiness is not wellbeing itself. We can't ignore the cyclical ups and downs that are a natural part of every person's life. Research has found that difficult (“unhappy”) times, and the growth that comes with them, are an important part of human wellbeing.⁴

Similarly, wellbeing isn't necessarily synonymous with an “easy” life, or a wealthy life. Even though our consumer culture today places high importance on money and status, wellbeing has no correlation with money, aside from achieving a basic state of safety or financial/material stability. In fact, wealth has sometimes been found to have the opposite effect on wellbeing.

¹ Global Wellness Institute. <https://globalwellnessinstitute.org/>

² VanderWeele, Tyler J. “On the promotion of human flourishing.” Proc Natl Acad Sci U S A. 2017 Aug 1;114(31):8148-8156.

³ World Health Organization. <https://www.who.int/>

⁴ “The Good Life or the Goods Life? Positive Psychology and Personal Wellbeing in the Culture of Consumption.” Positive Psychology in Practice, 2004.

Studies have shown that adolescents who put a high priority on being rich are especially likely to have attention deficit disorder, separation anxiety disorder, personality disorders, and more.⁵

What Determines Wellbeing

A number of variables contribute to a state of overall wellbeing. If wellbeing is the health of the mind, body, and spirit, then diet, nutrition and exercise only constitute a part. According to research, life satisfaction, good relationships, and feelings of meaning are among the most important determinants of overall wellbeing.⁶

Elements of Wellbeing Beyond Physical Health

Self-compassion	A healthy and positive attitude towards oneself, particularly during times of adversity. ⁷
Compassion	A sensitivity to suffering in others, with a commitment to try and alleviate and prevent it. ⁸
Mindfulness and Presence	The experience of purposefully paying attention to the present moment. ⁹
Intrinsic Motivation	When a behavior is performed for its own sake and is wholly self-endorsed. ¹⁰
Happiness	Long-term balance of positive and negative affect, or life satisfaction. ¹¹
A Balanced Time Perspective	How dominant the past, present, or future is in a person's thoughts. ¹²

⁵ "Value Pathways to Wellbeing: Healthy Values, Valued Goal Attainment, and Environmental Congruence." Positive Psychology in Practice, 2004.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Souza, L.K., Hutz, C.S., 2016. Adaptation of the self-compassion scale for use in Brazil: evidences of construct validity. Trends in Psychology 24 (1), 159–172. <https://doi.org/10.9788/TP2016.1-11>.

⁸ Gilbert, P. et al. The development of compassionate engagement and action scales for self and others. J. Compassionate Heal. Care 4,1–24, <https://doi.org/10.1186/s40639-017-0033-3> (2017).

⁹ Kabat-Zinn, J., 2019. Foreword: seeds of a necessary global renaissance in the making: the refining of psychology's understanding of the nature of mind, self, and embodiment through the lens of mindfulness and its origins at a key inflection point for the species. Curr Opin Psychol 28. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.copsyc.2019.02.005> xi-xvii.

¹⁰ "Fostering Healthy Self-Regulation from Within and Without." Positive Psychology in Practice, 2004.

¹¹ "Achieving Sustainable New Happiness: Prospects, Practices, and Prescription." Positive Psychology in Practice, 2004.

¹² "Balancing Time Perspective in Pursuit of Optimal Functioning." Positive Psychology in Practice, 2004.

Self-compassion	A healthy and positive attitude towards oneself, particularly during times of adversity. ⁷
Emotional Clarity	The extent to which individuals can unambiguously identify and label their emotional experiences. ¹³
Purpose	The impact we want to have on the world. ¹⁴

Ilona Boniwell and Philip G. Zimbardo, in their article “Balancing Time Perspective in Pursuit of Optimal Functioning”, perhaps describe it best: “Working hard when it’s time to work, playing intensively when it’s time to play, enjoying listening to grandma’s old stories while she is still alive, meaningfully connecting with your friends, viewing children through the eyes of wonder with which they see the world, laughing at jokes and life’s absurdities” – these are the day-to-day moments that lead to wellbeing.

The Mind-Body Connection

Hundreds of research studies have confirmed the connection between mind and body. These findings are not surprising; they are most clearly seen in the effect of stress on a person’s physical health.

The Effects of Chronic Stress

Dozens of clinical studies have shown that mental and emotional stress weakens the human body. It can alter immune function and make us more susceptible to infection and inflammation. Chronic stress has been linked to a plethora of health conditions, including high blood pressure, high cholesterol, heart disease, obesity, cancer, depression, anxiety, and substance abuse.¹⁵ This is particularly troubling considering the trend of increasing stress around the world. According to American Psychological Association data, workers across the world reported feeling more stressed in 2021 than they were in 2020.¹⁶

Why does this mind-body connection exist? According to Oakley Ray, Professor Emeritus of Psychology, Psychiatry and Pharmacology at Vanderbilt University, “there is no real division between mind and body because of networks of communication that exist between the brain

¹³ Lischetzke, T. & Eid, M. The functionality of emotional clarity: A process-oriented approach to understanding the relation between emotional clarity and wellbeing. In M. D. Robinson & M. Eid (Eds.), *The happy mind: Cognitive contributions to wellbeing*. New York: Springer.

¹⁴ Six Seconds: The Emotional Intelligence Network. <https://www.6seconds.org/>

¹⁵ David A. Padgett and Ronald Glaser. “How stress influences the immune response.” *Trends in Immunology*. 24:8. August 2003.

¹⁶ Abramson, Ashley. “Burnout and Stress are Everywhere.” American Psychological Association. 2022. <https://www.apa.org/monitor/2022/01/special-burnout-stress>

and neurological, endocrine and immune systems.”¹⁷ Research shows that what we think and feel directly impacts which chemicals and hormones our brains produce.

The Mind-Body Connection Can Improve Wellbeing

The good news is that the mind-body connection can work in our favor to improve our state of wellbeing. Studies have shown, for example, that physical touch (like being hugged) has protective effects on our physiological stress responses.¹⁸

Physical exercise can “[decrease] the psychological and physiological response to acute stress” for up to 24 hours after exercise.¹⁹ This is because exercise increases oxygen to the brain, releases neurotransmitters like endorphins, endocannabinoids, and dopamine, and promotes neuroplasticity – your brain’s ability to change and develop.²⁰ Three key results of exercise are improved executive functions, enhanced mood states (reduced anxiety and depression), and decreased stress levels.²¹

People who exercise report having 1.5 fewer days of poor mental health a month than people who do not exercise.²² A participant in one study explained the impact of exercising: “[Exercise] means a feeling of enjoyment, of your whole body in motion, of every part, the way you’re actually feeling all parts of your body, particularly say if you’re running, for instance. Every part of your body is in use, and you can feel it all and that’s exhilarating.”²³

It’s important to note that more strenuous exercise, after a certain point, does not correlate with increased mental health benefits. According to a clinical study, forty-five minutes of exercise three to five times a week gives the biggest benefits.²⁴

Similarly, activities associated with positive mental health can have a positive impact on physical health. Practicing self-compassion, for example, leads to better physical health in both healthy and chronically ill populations.²⁵ Self-reassurance has been shown to protect against depression and anxiety,²⁶ and learning to be kinder to oneself (rather than being self-critical)

¹⁷ Ray, Oakley. “Unpacking the Mind-Body Connection to Health.” *Modern Medicine*. 3: 2021.

¹⁸ Aljoscha Dreisoerner et al. “Self-soothing touch and being hugged reduce cortisol responses to stress: A randomized controlled trial on stress, physical touch, and social identity.” *Comprehensive Psychoneuroendocrinology* 8 (2021).

¹⁹ Reed J, Ones DS. The effect of acute aerobic exercise on positive activated affect: A meta-analysis. *Psychology of Sport and Exercise*. 2006;7(5):477–514.

²⁰ “Exercise and the Brain: The Mental Health Benefits of Exercise.” Healthline. 2022.
<https://www.healthline.com/health/depression/exercise#What-are-the-mental-health-benefits-of-exercise>

²¹ “Fostering Healthy Self-Regulation from Within and Without.” *Positive Psychology in Practice*, 2004.

²² “Exercise linked to improved mental health, but more may not always be better.” *The Lancet*. 8 Aug 2018.
<https://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2018/08/180808193656.htm>

²³ “Physical Activity: Positive Psychology in Motion.” *Positive Psychology in Practice*, 2004.

²⁴ “Exercise linked to improved mental health, but more may not always be better.” *The Lancet*. 8 Aug 2018.

²⁵ Anna M. Friis. “Kindness Matters: A Randomized Controlled Trial of a Mindful Self-Compassion Intervention Improves Depression, Distress, and HbA1c Among Patients With Diabetes.” *Diabetes Care* 2016.

²⁶ Petrocchi, N., Dentale, F. & Gilbert, P. Self-reassurance, not self-esteem, serves as a buffer between self-criticism and depressive symptoms. *Psychol. Psychother. Theory, Res. Pract.* 92, 394–406, <https://doi.org/10.1111/papt.12186> (2019).

has been shown to have metabolic benefits among patients with diabetes.²⁷ Happiness has been found to be associated with enhanced physical health and even longer life.²⁸

The Value of Mindfulness Training

Mindfulness has been shown to be one of the most effective techniques for improved mental health – and research conducted over the past 25 years indicates that mindfulness can be enhanced through mindfulness training.²⁹ Mindfulness, for example, has been proven to have a “direct causal effect” on quality of life in cancer patients undergoing chemotherapy.³⁰ Mindfulness meditation is equally as effective as physical exercise in improving attention control, executive functioning, and worrying.³¹

Given these results, it would seem like one solution to improving our overall wellbeing is expanding access to mental health treatments and training. But over the last several decades, access to mental health treatments have improved dramatically, and yet rates of mental health problems have not decreased.³² This is where spiritual wellbeing comes in.

Spirit: Meaning, Purpose and Community

The connection between the mind and the body has been well-established in science, media, and public awareness, but the spiritual component to wellbeing has often been overlooked. Wellbeing should be thought of as a three-legged stool – without the mind, body *or* spirit components, the stool will be unstable. This is one of the reasons why the ‘spiritual dimension’ is part of the World Health Organization strategies for health.³³

Many studies have confirmed the relationship between religion/spirituality and physical and mental health conditions, including high blood pressure, cerebro-vascular disease, heart disease, immune system dysfunction, improved ability to cope with cancer, chronic illness, longevity, and more.³⁴ A 2018 study on quality of life in cancer patients, for example, found that any changes to the “physical, psychological, social and spiritual dimensions can influence... the other dimensions.”³⁵

²⁷ Friis 2016.

²⁸ “Achieving Sustainable New Happiness: Prospects, Practices, and Prescriptions.” *Positive Psychology in Practice*, 2003.

²⁹ “Fostering Healthy Self-Regulation from Within and Without.” *Positive Psychology in Practice*, 2004.

³⁰ “Quality of life, self-compassion and mindfulness in cancer patients undergoing chemotherapy: A cross-sectional study.” *European Journal of Oncology Nursing*. Ana Claudia Mesquita Garcia et al., 2021.

³¹ “A RCT Comparing Daily Mindfulness Meditations, Biofeedback Exercises, and Daily Physical Exercise on Attention Control, Executive Functioning, Mindful Awareness, Self-Compassion, and Worrying in Stressed Young Adults.” *Mindfulness*. Esther I. de Bruin et al. 2 July 2016.

³² Curran, T. & Hill, A. P. Perfectionism is increasing over time: A meta-analysis of birth cohort differences from 1989 to 2016. *Psychol. Bull.* 145, 410–429, <https://doi.org/10.1037/bul0000138> (2019).

³³ Chirico, Francesco. “Spiritual wellbeing in the 21st century: it’s time to review the current WHO’s health definition?” *Journal of Health and Social Sciences* 2016; 1,1: 11-16

³⁴ *Ibid.*

³⁵ Jitender, S., Mahajan, R., Rathore, V., Choudhary, R., 2018. Quality of life of cancer patients. *J. Exp. Therapeut. Oncol.* 12, 217–221.

What Is Spiritual Wellbeing?

Spirit is an integral part of wellbeing and essential for health. Spiritual wellbeing is not the same as psychological wellbeing; nor is it the same as religiousness (although both of these can play a part).³⁶ While there is no universal agreement about the meaning of “spirit” or “spirituality”, for the purposes of this paper, we will be defining spiritual wellbeing as “having meaning, purpose and community in one’s life.”

In traditional Chinese Medicine, which dates back over 3000 years, the mind, body, and spirit of a person are considered inseparable. Contemporary western medicine – which for hundreds of years focused only on the body, and only very recently on the mind – is becoming increasingly aware of the significant links between spirituality and health, both mental and physical.³⁷

Tyler J. VanderWeele, the director of Harvard’s Human Flourishing Program, has recommended that “empirical studies and the measures used should more often consider a broader conception of wellbeing and flourishing.” This broader definition, he argues, should include factors like meaning, purpose, close social relationships, and character and virtue.³⁸ Activities and choices that elevate any of these variables (such as marriage, for example) are associated with better mental health, physical health, and longevity,³⁹

Studies have found that spirituality – a belief in something bigger than yourself – helps regulate our emotions, which in turn impacts physiological effects such as blood pressure.⁴⁰ Spirituality can also improve strategies for managing stress and can positively impact the immune, cardiovascular, hormonal, and nervous systems.⁴¹

Religion: The Social + The Spiritual

Religion, while it is not by itself necessary to achieve spiritual wellbeing, should not be discounted. Approximately 84% of the world’s population report a religious affiliation,⁴² and in the United States, 89% believe in God or a universal spirit.⁴³

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ VanderWeele, Tyler J. “On the promotion of human flourishing...”

³⁹ Wilcox WB. *Why Marriage Matters: 30 Conclusions from the Social Sciences* (Institute for American Values/National Marriage Project, New York), 3rd Ed. 2011.

⁴⁰ Aldwin CM, Park CL, Jeong YJ, Nath R. Differing pathways between religiousness, spirituality, and health: a self-regulation perspective. *Psycholog Relig Spiritual*. 2014;6(1):9-21. DOI:10.1037/a0034416.

⁴¹ Chirico, Francesco. “Spiritual wellbeing in the 21st century...”

⁴² Pew Research. “The Global Religious Landscape.” 2012. <https://www.pewresearch.org/religion/2012/12/18/global-religious-landscape-exec/>

⁴³ Gallup (2015–2016) Religion. Available at www.gallup.com/poll/1690/religion.aspx. Accessed July 28, 2016.

A communal form of religious practice, particularly, has been shown to bring about better health outcomes than solitary spiritual practices.⁴⁴ Regular religious service attendance is associated with greater longevity, a 30% lower incidence of depression, a fivefold lower rate of suicide, better survival from cancer, and numerous other outcomes.⁴⁵ Service attendance is also associated with greater meaning in life.⁴⁶ This could be because service attendance combines spiritual practices with social support. And social support—strong relationships with family and friends—can buffer the effects of various psychosocial stresses that can compromise health.⁴⁷

Purpose and Meaning

Anything that helps us find purpose and meaning can improve our spiritual and overall wellbeing. Research shows that individuals who place importance on intrinsic compared to extrinsic goals report better quality of life on a variety of measures of wellbeing. Practices that support spiritual wellbeing – whether that is church attendance or community service – remind us of the importance of these intrinsic goals. Practices that encourage self-knowledge and self-acceptance, close relationships with others, and contribution to the community “will not only dislodge extrinsic values, but also increase the likelihood that people will have the types of experiences that really do satisfy their psychological needs.”⁴⁸

Other areas where we find purpose and meaning are also important. Education, for example, is associated with higher levels of happiness. And those who are employed have higher levels of life satisfaction and better mental and physical health.⁴⁹

Wellbeing in the Workplace: A Troubling Trend

Workplace stress is exacting an ever-higher physical and psychological toll on American workers.⁵⁰ Employer healthcare costs due to workplace stress have reached \$200 billion a year,⁵¹ and 76% of U.S. workers report at least one symptom of a mental health condition. 84% of respondents said their workplace conditions have contributed to at least one mental health challenge.⁵²

⁴⁴ Lim C, Putnam RD (2010) Religion, social networks, and life satisfaction. *Am Sociol Rev* 75:914–933.

⁴⁵ VanderWeele, Tyler J. “On the promotion of human flourishing...”

⁴⁶ Krause N, Hayward RD (2012) Religion, meaning in life, and change in physical functioning during late adulthood. *J Adult Dev* 19:158–169.

⁴⁷ Uchino, Bert N. “Social support and health: A review of physiological processes potentially underlying links to disease outcomes,” *Journal of Behavioral Medicine*, August 2006, Volume 29, Number 4, pp. 377–87.

⁴⁸ “Value Pathways to Wellbeing...” *Positive Psychology in Practice*, 2004.

⁴⁹ McKee-Ryan F, Song Z, Wanberg CR, Kinicki AJ (2005) Psychological and physical wellbeing during unemployment: A meta-analytic study. *J Appl Psychol* 90:53–76.

⁵⁰ Pfeffer, Jeffrey. “The overlooked essentials of employee wellbeing.” *McKinsey Quarterly*. September 2018.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*

⁵² Mind Share Partners. <https://www.mindsharepartners.org/mentalhealthatworkreport-2021>

Because of the mind-body-spirit connection, we know that mental or emotional stress can impact the human body in multiple ways. In one study, work stress (defined as high job demands and low job control) contributed to a cluster of risk factors that predict the likelihood of getting heart disease and type 2 diabetes.⁵³

Covid-19 especially brought these increasing trends to light. More than half of Americans say the pandemic has negatively affected their mental health⁵⁴, and the National Academy of Medicine, the American Psychological Association, the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and more have called for national attention to the effects of the workplace on health. The Securities and Exchange Commission now requires public companies to include human capital metrics used internally for operations in their public filings.

Most recently, the Surgeon General's Framework for Workplace Mental Health and Wellbeing calls for more attention to the connection between the wellbeing of workers and the health of organizations.⁵⁵

Surgeon General's Framework for Workplace Mental Health and Wellbeing



⁵³ Pfeffer, Jeffrey. "The overlooked essentials of employee wellbeing." McKinsey Quarterly. September 2018.

⁵⁴ Panchal, Nirmita et al. "The Implications of COVID-19 for Mental Health and Substance Use." 10 Feb 2021. <https://www.kff.org/coronavirus-covid-19/issue-brief/the-implications-of-covid-19-for-mental-health-and-substance-use/>

⁵⁵ U.S. Surgeon General: Our Priorities: Workplace Mental Health and Wellbeing. <https://www.hhs.gov/surgeongeneral/priorities/workplace-wellbeing>

The Benefits of Wellbeing in the Workplace

Our workplaces play a significant role in our wellbeing. We spend about half of our waking hours at work. That’s why wellbeing benefits are becoming increasingly valuable to employees – especially Gen Z and Millennials – as they consider remaining with their current employers or looking elsewhere.

Organizations that support wellbeing have higher performance, retention, creativity, and more. As companies continue to expand their investment in corporate wellbeing programs, those who don’t will struggle to compete. The total budget for wellbeing programs in large U.S. companies averaged \$6 million in 2021, up from the average budget of \$4.9 million in 2020. In companies with more than 20,000 employees, the 2021 average was \$10.5 million.⁵⁶ According to McKinsey, the number one priority for workplaces in the coming years is employee wellbeing.⁵⁷

Growth and Retention	62% of U.S. workers say that employee wellbeing support and benefits are a top priority when applying for or considering their next job ⁵⁸ and Gen Z workers say it is their number one priority. ⁵⁹
Performance and Productivity	More than 90 percent of business leaders say that promoting wellness affects employee productivity and performance. ⁶⁰
Creativity	72% of employees who rate their organization highly for promoting wellbeing also rate it highly for encouraging creativity and innovation. ⁶¹
Resilience	81% of resilient employees say that workplace wellbeing initiatives help them lead healthier lives. ⁶²
Employee Engagement	There is a strong connection between workplace benefits and engagement; more than 76% of engaged workers say they are satisfied with their benefits. ⁶³ This is important because

⁵⁶ Miller, Stephen. “Employers Enhance Wellbeing Benefits for a Post-Pandemic Workforce.” SHRM. <https://www.shrm.org/resourcesandtools/hr-topics/benefits/pages/employers-enhance-wellbeing-benefits-for-a-post-pandemic-workforce.aspx>

⁵⁷ Hilton Segel, Liz. “The priority for workplaces in the new normal? Wellbeing.” McKinsey. Jan 2021. [mckinsey.com/featured-insights/world-economic-forum/davos-agenda/perspectives/the-priority-for-workplaces-in-the-new-normal](https://www.mckinsey.com/featured-insights/world-economic-forum/davos-agenda/perspectives/the-priority-for-workplaces-in-the-new-normal)

⁵⁸ “Report: Over 60 percent of Employees Surveyed Indicate Wellbeing Support as Top Priority when Seeking Employment.” Paychex. 15 Dec 2021. <https://www.paychex.com/newsroom/news-releases/employees-indicate-wellbeing-top-priority>

⁵⁹ Bizouati-Kennedy, Yaël. “42% of Gen Z Prioritize Work-Life Balance Over Other Job Perks, Survey Says.” Yahoo. 15 Sept 2021. <https://www.yahoo.com/video/42-gen-z-prioritize-life-161927571.html>

⁶⁰ “Employers See Wellness Link to Productivity, Performance.” SHRM. 2015. <https://www.shrm.org/resourcesandtools/hr-topics/benefits/pages/wellness-productivity-link-.aspx>

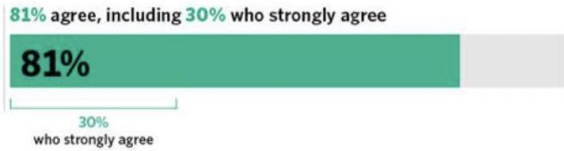
⁶¹ Miller, Stephen. “Study Links Wellness and Work/Life Programs to Creativity.” SHRM. 2010. <https://www.shrm.org/resourcesandtools/hr-topics/benefits/pages/wellbeinginnovation.aspx>

⁶² “Becoming a rising, resilient business.” Aon. 2020. <https://www.aon.com/risingresilient/whitepaper/becoming-a-rising-resilient-business>

⁶³ “Workplace Wellbeing.” SHRM. <https://www.shrm.org/resourcesandtools/hr-topics/benefits/documents/resources-whitepapers-health-and-wellbeing.pdf>

	disengaged employees cost U.S. companies up to \$550 billion a year. ⁶⁴
Enjoyment of Work	Over 80% of employees whose employers are engaged in their wellness say they enjoy work. ⁶⁵
Fewer Sick Days	56% of employees who participate in company wellness programs say they have fewer sick days due to these programs. ⁶⁶
ROI	Companies that provide wellness programs see a six-to-one return on investment (ROI) on average. ⁶⁷

% OF WORKERS WHO AGREE THAT HOW EMPLOYERS SUPPORT MENTAL HEALTH WILL BE AN IMPORTANT CONSIDERATION FOR THEM WHEN THEY LOOK FOR FUTURE WORK:



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The Connection Between Leadership and Wellbeing in the Workplace

Work plays a significant role in human wellbeing. When people thrive at work, they are more likely to feel physically and mentally healthy overall, and to contribute positively to their workplace.⁶⁸ Employers are offering more wellbeing benefits than ever, but it’s clear that meditation apps and gym memberships aren’t moving the needle. Why?

Wellbeing must start with leadership. In 2022, fewer than one in four U.S. employees said they feel strongly that their organization cares about their wellbeing.⁶⁹ The biggest driver of burnout is

⁶⁴ Behesti, Naz. “10 Timely Statistics About The Connection Between Employee Engagement And Wellness.” Forbes. 2019. <https://www.forbes.com/sites/nazbeheshti/2019/01/16/10-timely-statistics-about-the-connection-between-employee-engagement-and-wellness/?sh=79a3376822a0>

⁶⁵ “Employee Wellness Statistics.” Zippia. 14 Nov 2022. <https://www.zippia.com/advice/employee-wellness-statistics/>

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ Kleine, A.-K., Rudolph, C. W., & Zacher, H. (2019). Thriving at work: A meta-analysis. *Journal of Organizational Behavior*. 40(9-10), 973-999. <https://doi.org/10.1002/job.2375>

⁶⁹ Harter, Jim. “Percent Who Feel Employer Cares About Their Wellbeing Plummet.” Gallup. Mar 2022. <https://www.gallup.com/workplace/390776/percent-feel-employer-cares-wellbeing-plummet.aspx>

lack of leadership support. Employees who feel supported by their managers experience 70% less burnout.⁷⁰

Fighting the Stigma

Other than advocating for wellbeing benefits, the most important thing workplace leaders can do is normalize practices that encourage wellbeing by modeling them. A stigma around wellbeing still exists. For example, only 38% of those who know about their organization's mental health services would feel comfortable using them.⁷¹ Cultures of wellbeing in corporate America must start with top leadership supporting these programs both vocally and in practice.

“Sustainable change must be driven by committed leaders in continuous collaboration with the valued workers who power each workplace.” – U.S. Surgeon General⁷²

This is especially important for underrepresented minority workers, who are more likely to experience burnout.⁷³ While companies have given greater attention to Diversity, Equality, and Inclusion (DEI) in recent years, younger workers especially are more likely to view DEI policies as “mostly for show.”⁷⁴ Employers must take care to ensure that their DEI policies are meaningful and lead to measurable results.

What Leaders Can Do

McKinsey suggests that leaders who want to increase employee wellbeing demonstrate a clear commitment to offering help; encourage people to care for one another; and ensure that people are less separated by title.

For example, the healthcare and dialysis company DaVita created the DaVita Village Network to give employees the opportunity to help each other during times of crisis—such as a natural disaster, an accident, or an illness. The company provides funding to match employee contributions of up to \$250,000 per year.⁷⁵ Other companies have created similar networks by inviting employees to contribute unused PTO to a pool that can be accessed by employees facing a health crisis, bereavement, or needing more parental leave.

Job control—the amount of discretion employees have to determine what they do and how they do it—is another important determination of wellbeing. Studies have shown that greater job

⁷⁰ “Employee Burnout: The Main Causes.” Gallup. 12 July 2018. <https://www.gallup.com/workplace/237059/employee-burnout-part-main-causes.aspx>

⁷¹ Mental Health America. (2022). Mind the workplace survey. <https://www.mhanational.org/mind-workplace>

⁷² <https://www.hhs.gov/surgeongeneral/priorities/workplace-wellbeing>

⁷³ Lawrence JA, Davis BA, Corbette T, Hill EV, Williams DR, Reede JY. Racial/Ethnic Differences in Burnout: a Systematic Review. *J Racial Ethn Health Disparities*. 2022 Feb;9(1):257-269.

⁷⁴ “Workers appreciate and seek mental health support in the workplace.” APA. 2022. <https://www.apa.org/pubs/reports/work-wellbeing/2022-mental-health-support>

⁷⁵ Ibid.

control can positively impact workers' physical health. One study of individuals at 72 diverse organizations in the northeastern United States reported a significant connection between job control, anxiety, and depression."⁷⁶ Organizations can create greater job control by promoting worker autonomy and by erecting barriers to micromanagement."⁷⁷

According to the Surgeon General's framework for supporting workplace wellbeing, additional ideas to support wellbeing in the workplace include:⁷⁸

Normalize mental health care by outwardly encouraging time off for that purpose.	Prioritize increased access to paid leave.	Recognize and reward good work.
Create time for non-work connection, such as community service.	Limit digital communication outside work hours and increase flexibility of work hours.	Build trust and communication by inviting employees to share small moments, such as a cup of coffee.
Limit work hours (long work hours have been shown to raise workers' risk for exhaustion, anxiety, and depression).	Engage workers in workplace decisions through surveys.	Establish clear pathways for career advancement, such as tuition reimbursement for classes offered outside of the workplace.

Conclusion

The science behind wellbeing supports a strong connection between the mind, body, and spirit. Western medicine, clinical studies and workplaces have only recently begun to address the key importance of spirit – meaning and purpose – in overall wellbeing, and there is more work to be done in this area.

Workplaces will play a critical role in improving wellbeing across the world in the coming years. As the lines between work and home continue to blur, work-life balance becomes increasingly meaningful. Leaders must spearhead wellbeing initiatives by starting with their own minds, bodies, and spirits, and then applying what they learn to improving their employees' overall wellbeing.

⁷⁶ Chester S. Spell and Todd Arnold, "An appraisal perspective of justice, structure, and job control as antecedents of psychological distress," *Journal of Organizational Behavior*, August 2007, Volume 28, Number 6, pp. 729–51.

⁷⁷ "The overlooked essentials of employee wellbeing." Jeffrey Pfeffer. *McKinsey Quarterly*. September 2018. <https://www.mckinsey.com/capabilities/people-and-organizational-performance/our-insights/the-overlooked-essentials-of-employee-wellbeing>

⁷⁸ U.S. Surgeon General: Our Priorities: Workplace Mental Health and Wellbeing. <https://www.hhs.gov/surgeongeneral/priorities/workplace-wellbeing>