

## Wellness FAQs

**Question 1: I see the term “wellness” everywhere these days, but what does it really mean?**

**Answer:** According to the National Wellness Institute, wellness is “a conscious, self-directed and evolving process of achieving full potential... encompassing lifestyle, mental and spiritual well-being, and the environment.” Their interdependent model of wellness includes six dimensions: occupational (personal satisfaction and enrichment through work), spiritual (search for meaning and purpose in human existence), physical (good exercise and eating habits), intellectual (creative, stimulating mental activities), emotional (awareness and acceptance of one's feelings), and social (contributing to one's environment and community). Occupational therapy practitioners will recognize the holistic values of our own profession in the above definition. For more information, see the National Wellness Institute Web site at: [http://www.nationalwellness.org/index.php?id\\_tier=2](http://www.nationalwellness.org/index.php?id_tier=2)

**Question 2: How does wellness relate to AOTA’s Centennial Vision?**

**Answer:** AOTA’s Centennial Vision for the profession’s 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary in 2017 states that “we envision that occupational therapy is a powerful, widely recognized, science-driven, and evidence-based profession with a globally connected and diverse workforce meeting society’s occupational needs.” In addition to identifying actions needed to make the Vision a reality, AOTA identified six practice areas around which to focus Centennial Vision efforts. ‘Health and wellness’ and ‘productive aging’ are two of those practice areas. Expanding the role of occupational therapy in facilitating wellness among older adults will help to increase the visibility of our profession to the public.

**Question 3: Where can I learn more about the role of health and wellness in the field of Gerontology?**

**Answer:** The National Resource Center on Nutrition, Physical Activity & Aging describes a wide variety of wellness activities for older Americans, ranging from physical activity programs to mental health programs to specifics like safe driving classes. Go to: [http://nutritionandaging.fiu.edu/creative\\_solutions/wellness\\_programs.asp](http://nutritionandaging.fiu.edu/creative_solutions/wellness_programs.asp).

AOTA has published a statement describing the role of occupational therapy practitioners in the development and provision of health promotion programs and services. See:

American Occupational Therapy Association. (2008). Occupational therapy services in the promotion of health and the prevention of disease and disability. *American Journal of Occupational Therapy*, 62, 694-703.

The September 2008 issue of the *Gerontology SIS Quarterly* contains an article on implementing wellness programs for older adults. This article provides specific suggestions for starting wellness programs in different settings serving older adults including skilled nursing facilities, continuing care retirement communities, and outpatient clinics. See:  
Rigsbee, S.P., & Tyck, A.L. (2008, September). Wellness programs for older adults. *Gerontology Special Interest Section Quarterly*, 31(3), 1-4.

Lifestyle Redesign® is an occupation-based wellness program that served as the intervention for the Well Elderly study conducted by occupational science faculty at the University of Southern California. The program is described in detail in the following book:

Mandel, D., Jackson, J., Zemke, R., Nelson, L., & Clark, F. (1999). *Lifestyle redesign: Implementing the well elderly program*. Bethesda, MD: American Occupational Therapy Association.

**Question 4: What are some examples of wellness programs in community settings and programs that can be established in long term care settings?**

**Answer:** Community-based wellness programs can be aimed at promoting healthy and safe lifestyles among the well elderly population, such as:

- Walking programs
- Exercise classes focusing on strength, balance, and/or flexibility
- Lifestyle Redesign®
- Fall prevention programs
- Classes on safe driving and the effects of aging on driving abilities

Community wellness programs may also focus on preventing unnecessary disability and complications among those with an existing illness or challenge, such as:

- Arthritis exercise programs
- Caregiver support and education programs
- Stroke recovery programs
- Educational programs on living with low vision or hearing loss
- Parkinson's programs
- Cognitive programs to stimulate memory

In the assisted living or long-term-care setting, occupational therapy practitioners can team up with activities or nursing personnel to develop and implement wellness-oriented programs such as:

- Regular exercise classes for residents at different levels of function, e.g. seated active range of motion exercises for wheelchair-bound residents all the way to simple standing balance for ambulatory residents
- Walk to Dine programs
- Intergenerational programs that offer residents a chance to share their experiences and skills with younger people

- A modified Lifestyle Redesign® program working within the occupational choices available in a given setting
- Leisure programs classified on the physical and cognitive levels of patients

**Question 5: How do I go about starting a wellness program?**

**Answer:**

- Decide on the target population: Is the program designed for community-dwelling older adults, like a senior citizen apartment, independent living, an assisted living facility, or is it for patients in a long-term nursing facility setting?
- Determine the unmet wellness needs of your population. Perhaps there are already plenty of exercise classes available for older adults, but few opportunities to address emotional and social wellness.
- Identify and develop occupation-based interventions to address the identified needs. The Evidence-Based Practice area on the AOTA Web site is a useful starting place.
- Develop a budget for implementing the program and, depending on your setting, propose the program to management staff with an emphasis on how the program can benefit both the clients and the organization.
- Seek client feedback after implementing the program to determine how well it met their needs and what needs to be revised.

**Useful Web sites:**

American Association of Retired Persons: Healthy Living  
<http://www.aarp.org/health/healthyliving/>

American Society on Aging: Health Promotion and Disease Prevention for Older Adults  
<http://www.asaging.org/cdc/index.cfm>

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention: Healthy Aging Program  
<http://www.cdc.gov/aging/>

International Council on Active Aging  
<http://www.icaa.cc/>

National Institutes of Health: SeniorHealth  
<http://nihseniorhealth.gov/>