



**At a Glance:** Ensure personal wellbeing and work-life balance by establishing priorities (e.g., activities, exercise, sleep, nutrition, time with loved ones) that fulfill personal needs and enable feeling supported by others.

## Understanding Healthy Living

Healthy living is the practice of health-promoting physical and mental behaviors, aiming at enhancing personal wellbeing and work-life balance. According to the Canadian Public Health Agency, healthy living consists of supporting, improving, maintaining and/or enhancing the health of the community as a whole<sup>1</sup>. While it can be defined more broadly, in this context we will focus on two essential components of healthy living: physical health (sleep, exercise, eating well), and personal activities (hobbies, social activities, leisure time) that are known to impact your overall wellbeing.

### Why does it matter?

A healthy life is reflected by the preservation of our personal wellbeing and healthy social life as we work towards achieving our goals. In a professional context, pursuing a healthy lifestyle positively impacts productivity at work and personal satisfaction. Employees who exercise during work days have reported an improved mood that has led to a significant increase in work performance, improved tolerance and work-based relationships, and a heightened resilience when facing stressful circumstances<sup>2</sup>.

There are numerous neurological benefits to exercise including enhanced cognitive capabilities<sup>3</sup>, promotion of brain longevity<sup>4</sup>, effective stress and anxiety management<sup>5</sup>, improved brain health<sup>6</sup>, facilitation of learning and memory performance<sup>7</sup>, short-term euphoria<sup>8</sup>, and the prevention and treatment of depression<sup>9</sup>. Nutrition has also been shown to have a direct link to self-esteem, and education about healthy living has been shown to increase self-esteem in certain populations<sup>10</sup>. Additionally, the oxytocin release experienced during the social bonding inherent to team sports or leisure time with others decreases stress, and the act of caring for others in a social setting has been shown as a predictor of reduced mortality<sup>11</sup>.

## Cultivating Healthy Living

Aside from hitting the gym and eating right, there are several other components to keep in mind when cultivating a healthy lifestyle. Effective [time-management](#) strategies (such as a prioritization system to maintain a healthy work-life balance) are crucial to building and incorporating a support system of healthy social and personal habits into your busy schedule.

Maintaining nourishing relationships is also an important component of a healthy lifestyle as the people in your life have a significant impact on your wellbeing. While graduate school teaches autonomy, seeking support from your peers has the added value of boosting your wellbeing during graduate school, helping you to realize that you are not alone and that other students may be experiencing similar challenges. Sharing experiences with your peers will help you to build trust and friendships that are crucial for your wellbeing in graduate school. The greatest leaders in the world ask for support in times of need, and would not thrive without it.

Physical and mental health are closely interconnected. Our emotions and feelings can manifest as physical sensations in the body. You have likely experienced “butterflies” or “knots in your stomach” when you are excited or nervous. Many studies have highlighted the benefits of body-mind integration techniques, showing that mental health improved following various activities relying on physical elements (such as progressive muscle relaxation, yoga, and T'ai chi). These kinds of body-mind techniques help to regulate the body's stress-response system and bring the nervous system back into equilibrium<sup>12</sup>.

## Quick Guide to Healthy Living

- Evaluate your habits by taking a self-care questionnaire to help you identify the areas of your life that are well-tended and the ones that need some attention
- Value your “me time” to manage stress and increase happiness. Identify activities and hobbies that bring you pleasure and happiness and keep an open mind to exploring new interests
- Plan breaks during work hours to do something you enjoy, not a chore. Taking a ‘time out’ has been shown to counter the effects of fatigue and to increase productivity<sup>13</sup>
- Develop healthy sleep hygiene to balance your energy levels
- Incorporate healthy eating habits into your life using a support tool (e.g. app, healthy cooking book) and a reward system (e.g. indulge yourself with a favorite treat occasionally - you earned it!)
- Incorporate physical activity in your daily life. Several evidence-based studies have shown that the following activities have positive impacts on physical and mental wellbeing: yoga<sup>14</sup>, Group walking<sup>15</sup>, Dancing<sup>16</sup>, and Aerobic exercise<sup>17,18,19</sup>. Options include going to the gym and asking a coach or trainer for a structured program, or simply starting small and taking the stairs (escalators don’t count!)
- Socialize by attending or organizing social gatherings with colleagues and friends. Stay in touch with out of town friends and former colleagues<sup>20</sup>. Consider other graduate students as a source of solidarity rather than comparison. Relish in support of community. Hang out where people are happy, happiness is contagious<sup>21</sup>
- Do not hesitate to ask for help when you need it!

# Taking Action

## Services, Professional Development & Training

- Workshops - [McGill Wellness and Life-Skills Workshops](#): A series of workshops on mindfulness offered by the Counselling Services.
- Workshops - [McGill Arts Health and Wellness Week \(AHAW\)](#): A series of self-care activities throughout the week geared towards building awareness of your mental health and wellbeing!
- Peer support at McGill: <https://www.mcgill.ca/peerprograms/students-seeking-peer-support>
- [McGill Health Services](#)
- [Athletics & Recreation](#)

## Websites

- [Healthy Living](#): resources and reference material about healthy living for Canadians by the Public Health Service of Canada.
- [Healthy McGill](#): this website provides support and resources to help students achieve and maintain a healthy lifestyle.
- [McGill - The WELL Office](#): a comprehensive site to find information, services, events and resources to ensure students a healthy learning environment.
- [McGill Programs in Whole Person Care](#): a site to serve McGill and the wider community on whole person care through teaching, research and knowledge transfer.
- [McGill Counselling Self-Care Resources](#): a list of resources to promote student self-care on the topics of body image and eating, happiness, health and fitness, mindfulness and meditation, self-harm, and sleep hygiene.
- [Mindfulness@McGill](#): a central hub for all things related to mindfulness on campus.
- [Wellness@McGill](#): this website focuses on improving students' overall wellbeing.

## Groups / Associations

- [McGill - SWELL or Student Wellness](#): a psychoeducation program, facilitated by individuals with lived mental illness experiences.
- [Students in Mind \(SIM\)](#): an annual conference on topics surrounding mental health and promoting wellness.
- [Peer Support Centre \(PSC\) McGill](#): the PSC is a group of well-trained students providing support about anything on your mind.

## Books, Articles & Reports

- Public Health Agency of Canada. (2008). [Integrated Pan-Canadian Healthy Living Strategy](#). A comprehensive report on physical health from the Canadian Federal Government.
- Burns, D. D. (1999). [The feeling good handbook](#). New York, N.Y., U.S.A: Plume.
- Ender, S. C., & Newton, F. B. (2000). [Students helping students: A guide for peer educators on college campuses](#). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers.
- Goleman, D., & Franks, C. M. (January 01, 1996). [Emotional Intelligence: Why It Can Matter More Than IQ](#). Child & Family Behavior Therapy, 18, 2, 48.
- Kabat-Zinn, J. (2013). [Full catastrophe living: Using the wisdom of your body and mind to face stress, pain, and illness](#).
- Willett, W., Skerrett, P. J., Giovannucci, E. L., & Callahan, M. (2001). [Eat, drink, and be healthy: The Harvard Medical School guide to healthy eating](#). New York: Simon & Schuster Source.
- Williams, M., & Penman, D. (2011). [Mindfulness: An eight-week plan for finding peace in a frantic world](#). Emmaus, Pa: Rodale Books.

## References

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- <sup>1</sup> [Public Health Agency of Canada \(2013\)](#)
- <sup>2</sup> [Exercising at work and self-reported work performance. Coulson, J.C. \(2008\).](#)
- <sup>3</sup> [Fitness effects on the cognitive function of older adults: a meta-analytic study. Colcombe, S. \(2003\).](#)
- <sup>4</sup> [Leisure-time physical activity associates with cognitive decline. Wright, C.B. \(2016\).](#)
- <sup>5</sup> [Effects of Yoga Versus Walking on Mood, Anxiety, and Brain GABA Levels: A Randomized Controlled MRS Study. Streeter, C.C. \(2010\).](#)
- <sup>6</sup> [Exercise: a behavioral intervention to enhance brain health and plasticity. Cotman, C.W. \(2002\).](#)
- <sup>7</sup> [Exercise and time-dependent benefits to learning and memory. Berchtold, N.C. \(2010\).](#)
- <sup>8</sup> [Wired to run: exercise-induced endocannabinoid signaling in humans and cursorial mammals with implications for the 'runner's high'. Raichlen, D.A. \(2012\)](#)
- <sup>9</sup> [Exercise for depression. Cooney, G.M. \(2013\).](#)
- <sup>10</sup> [A Community-based Healthy Living Promotion Program Improved Self-esteem Among Minority Children. Wong, W.W. \(2016\).](#)
- <sup>11</sup> [Giving to others and the association between stress and mortality. Poulin, M.J. \(2013\).](#)
- <sup>12</sup> [Mind-Body Medicine for Treating Depression: Using the Mind to Alter the Body's Response to Stress. Selhub, E. \(2007\).](#)
- <sup>13</sup> [Can We Increase Psychological Well-Being? The Effects of Interventions on Psychological Well-Being: A Meta-Analysis of Randomized Controlled Trials. Weiss, L.A. \(2016\).](#)
- <sup>14</sup> [A meta-analysis of the effectiveness of yoga on mental health; taking on a dual perspective reflective the medical and positive perspective of mental health. Knobben, S. \(2013\).](#)
- <sup>15</sup> [Is there evidence that walking groups have health benefits? A systematic review and meta-analysis. Hanson, S. \(2013\).](#)
- <sup>16</sup> [Effects of dance movement therapy and dance on health-related psychological outcomes: A meta-analysis. Koch, S. \(2014\).](#)
- <sup>17</sup> [Physical exercise intervention in depressive disorders: Meta-analysis and systematic review. Josefsson, T. \(2014\).](#)
- <sup>18</sup> [A Meta-Analysis on the Anxiety-Reducing Effects of Acute and Chronic Exercise. Petruzello, S.J. \(1991\).](#)
- <sup>19</sup> [Enhancing well-being and alleviating depressive symptoms with positive psychology interventions: a practice-friendly meta-analysis. Sin, N.L. \(2009\).](#)
- <sup>20</sup> [Finding your community in graduate school. Barkley, D. \(2018\).](#)
- <sup>21</sup> [Enhancing well-being and alleviating depressive symptoms with positive psychology interventions: a practice-friendly meta-analysis. Sin, N.L. \(2009\).](#)