HEALTH TODAY

What comes to your mind when you hear the word health? Do you think of the way a person looks? Or maybe you think about the way a person acts. Most people would probably agree that health is a state of well-being. However, what defines a person’s state of well-being has changed considerably over the years.

HEALTH: PAST AND PRESENT

In the past, a healthy person was someone who was considered to be free of disease or illness. In the early 1900s, the leading causes of death were infectious diseases caused by things such as bacteria and viruses. If you had lived then, your chance of dying from pneumonia would have been three times greater than your chance of dying from cancer. Diseases such as pneumonia, influenza, and tuberculosis served as a constant threat to people of all ages. Therefore, it is not surprising that in the early 1900s, the emphasis of health was on freedom from illness.

MEDICAL ADVANCES Over the years, medical science began to unfold the mysteries of life-threatening infectious diseases to identify their causes. Through improved working and living conditions and new medicines, most of the diseases eventually were brought under control. As a result, many of the diseases that were common 70 to 100 years ago now can be prevented or cured and, in some cases, are nonexistent.

THE TEN LEADING CAUSES OF DEATH, 1900 AND TODAY

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1900</th>
<th>All Ages</th>
<th>Today</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pneumonia/Flu</td>
<td>Heart Diseases</td>
<td>Children Ages 1–14</td>
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<tr>
<td>Tuberculosis</td>
<td>Cancer</td>
<td>Accidents</td>
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<td>Inflammations of</td>
<td>Stroke</td>
<td>Cancer</td>
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<td>Digestive Tract</td>
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<td>Homicide</td>
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<td>Heart Diseases</td>
<td>Accidents</td>
<td>Suicide</td>
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<td>Stroke</td>
<td>Lung Diseases</td>
<td>Heart Diseases</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kidney Diseases</td>
<td>Pneumonia/Influenza</td>
<td>Cancer</td>
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<tr>
<td>Accidents</td>
<td>Diabetes Mellitus</td>
<td>HIV Infection</td>
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<tr>
<td>Cancer</td>
<td>Suicide</td>
<td>Pneumonia/Influenza</td>
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<td>Childhood Diseases</td>
<td>Infectious Diseases</td>
<td>Suicide</td>
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<td>Diphtheria</td>
<td>Liver Diseases</td>
<td>Lung Diseases</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>Pneumonia/Influenza</td>
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<td>Stroke</td>
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SOURCE: National Center for Health Statistics
Today, poor health is highly related to the way we live. With most infectious diseases under control, diseases that can be directly linked to life-style are now among the leading causes of death. These diseases are shown in Figure 1-1. Many of these diseases can be avoided. Therefore, the health focus of today is on wellness—a positive, whole-health approach that includes your physical, intellectual, social, and emotional well-being. Wellness means striving to live your life to its fullest potential and acting in healthy ways to prevent, or decrease the chances for, unnecessary illness.

LONGEVITY The practice of preventive behavior and advances in medical technology and living conditions enable you to enjoy a better and longer life. Controlling diseases has greatly increased the life expectancy of people around the world. Life expectancy is the measure of the average number of years that a group of people may expect to live. If you had been born in the United States in 1900, your life expectancy would have been only 47 years. Today you can expect to live for 75 years, as long as you maintain good health. Some researchers predict that through continued medical advances and the practice of preventive behaviors, the average life span of your children and grandchildren may approach 85 years.

WHAT DETERMINES HEALTH?

The United States Centers for Disease Control (CDC) have identified four major factors that determine your health. They are personal health behavior, your physical environment, hereditary influences, and the quality of health-care services that are available to you. Figure 1-2 shows the estimated percentage that each of these factors contributes to the leading causes of death.

HEALTH BEHAVIOR Personal health behaviors contribute to over 50 percent of all major causes of death. Health behavior refers to patterns of behavior that affect your health now and as you get older. Therefore, your personal life-style greatly affects the quality of your health. Over the years, research has identified a variety of behaviors that promote good health and tend to increase the average length of life. These behaviors include:

- Sleeping 7 to 8 hours daily
- Eating breakfast daily
- Rarely eating between meals
- Maintaining a healthy weight
- Reducing fat and salt in meals
- Getting regular physical exercise
- Avoiding the use of tobacco and alcohol
- Appropriately using only legal medications

A "can do" attitude about life can positively affect your overall health. What do you think it means when a person has a "can do" attitude?
PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT  Your physical environment is your surroundings—any place in which you live, work, and play. The conditions of your physical environment can directly affect your health. The quality of air both inside and outside may influence your chances of developing lung disorders. Too much noise, crowded living places, and infected food or water are other factors in the environment that can affect your health.

HEREDITY  Sometimes your ability to prevent diseases may be limited by hereditary factors. Heridity [huh RED ut ee] is the biological passing of physical traits from parents to their children. If several members of your family have died prematurely of heart disease, you may be at a higher risk of heart disease than someone whose family members have been free of heart disease. However, hereditary effects on your health often can be reduced by choosing responsible health behaviors. For example, eating properly, exercising regularly, and controlling your weight are steps you can take to reduce the chances for developing heart disease.

HEALTH-CARE SERVICES  The quality of the health care you have available to you also helps determine the quality of your general health. Regular medical and dental care can help to prevent many health problems. Preventing an illness usually is easier than curing an illness.

The Sociology of Health

For some Americans, obtaining good health is a greater challenge than it is for others. National health statistics indicate that health care is closely related to socioeconomic status, or the amount of money a family or individual earns. In other words, the rich are likely to be healthier than the poor.

The poor often lack adequate health insurance. Without the benefit of insurance, health care is expensive. For the poor, feeding their families and providing adequate housing may be greater priorities than health care. For many, taking time off from work to visit a doctor or a clinic can be costly or threatening to job security. For others, transportation to a health care facility may be difficult to arrange.

The health crisis in America is an issue that concerns all people. Everyone must work hard to change what has become a pattern of poor health among low-income citizens.
Wellness is much more than merely physical health, exercise or nutrition. It is the full integration of states of physical, mental, and spiritual well-being.

Each of these seven dimensions act and interact in a way that contributes to our own quality of life.

- **Social Wellness** is the ability to relate to and connect with other people in our world. Our ability to establish and maintain positive relationships with family, friends and co-workers contributes to our Social Wellness.

- **Emotional Wellness** is the ability to understand ourselves and cope with the challenges life can bring. The ability to acknowledge and share feelings of anger, fear, sadness or stress; hope, love, joy and happiness in a productive manner contributes to our Emotional Wellness.

- **Spiritual Wellness** is the ability to establish peace and harmony in our lives. The ability to develop congruency between values and actions and to realize a common purpose that binds creation together contributes to our Spiritual Wellness.

- **Environmental Wellness** is the ability to recognize our own responsibility for the quality of the air, the water and the land that surrounds us. The ability to make a positive impact on the quality of our environment, be it our homes, our communities or our planet contributes to our Environmental Wellness.

- **Occupational Wellness** is the ability to get personal fulfillment from our jobs or our chosen career fields while still maintaining balance in our lives. Our desire to contribute in our careers to make a positive impact on the organizations we work in and to society as a whole leads to Occupational Wellness.

- **Intellectual Wellness** is the ability to open our minds to new ideas and experiences that can be applied to personal decisions, group interaction and community betterment. The desire to learn new concepts, improve skills and seek challenges in pursuit of lifelong learning contributes to our Intellectual Wellness.

- **Physical Wellness** is the ability to maintain a healthy quality of life that allows us to get through our daily activities without undue fatigue or physical stress. The ability to recognize that our behaviors have a significant impact on our wellness and adopting healthful habits (routine check ups, a balanced diet, exercise, etc.) while avoiding destructive habits (tobacco, drugs, alcohol, etc.) will lead to optimal Physical Wellness.

http://wellness.ucr.edu/seven_dimensions.html