



# ABCs OF WELLNESS

## Facts and Tips for Whole Health

Primary care and behavioral health providers are responsible for ensuring the people they serve have quality health and wellness information. This information can be disseminated with several tools, including pamphlets, fact sheets, and interactive media. Although these tools cannot take the place of personal interactions, they are a practical and effective way to increase individuals' understanding of their health and how to make decisions that reflect their values.

As part of this special Whole Health edition of *National Council Magazine*, four fact sheets have been developed for healthcare providers to use when discussing health and wellness with the people they serve. A health screening form is also provided to help facilitate discussion about physical health status.

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# ABOUT THE NATIONAL COUNCIL

The National Council for Community Behavioral Healthcare represents 1,800 safety net mental health and addiction treatment organizations. Collectively, these organizations serve 8 million low-income children and adults struggling with mental health and addiction disorders. These individuals and their families confront addictions, schizophrenia, bipolar disorder, and depression — as well as chronic physical health conditions. National Council members offer intensive psychiatric treatment and rehabilitation services that allow adults with behavioral health disorders to live successfully in the community and allow children with emotional disturbances to live at home and to stay in school.

The National Council advocates for policies that ensure that people who are ill can access comprehensive healthcare services. We also offer state-of-the-science education and practice improvement resources so that services are efficient and effective.

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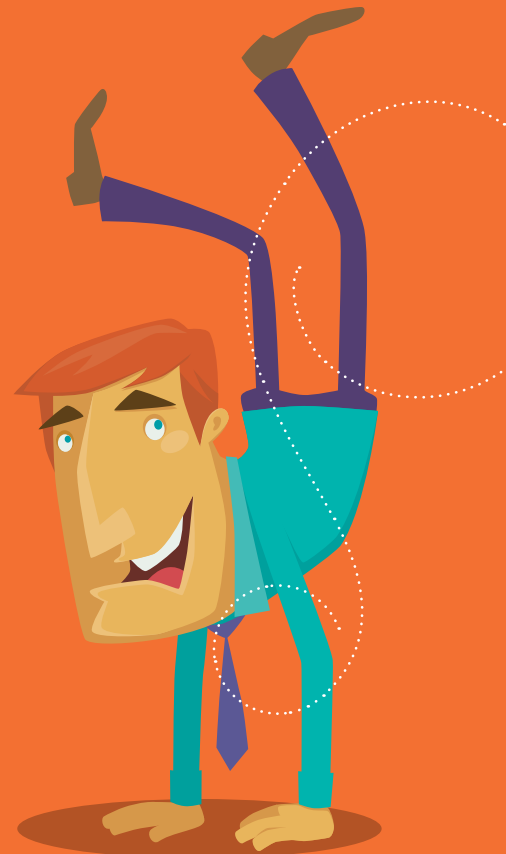
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# STAYING WELL

## IT'S AS SIMPLE AS YOUR ABCs...AND D & E

Recovery from mental illness is “a deeply personal, unique process of changing one’s attitudes, values, feelings, goals, skills, or roles. It is a way of living a satisfying, hopeful, and contributing life even with limitations caused by the illness.” A critical component of recovery, which is gaining more attention from consumers, healthcare providers, and advocacy groups, is the idea of wellness. Wellness is the state or quality of being in good mental and physical health. Achieving wellness requires lifestyle choices that support your mental and physical well-being.

Wellness is achieved through learning about your own mental and physical health. With this knowledge, you can make choices about how you want to improve your health. Wellness is a personal choice that requires you to take responsibility for how you take care of your body. Achieving wellness is easier if it is not done alone. Your healthcare team can help guide you through the process of understanding what areas of your mental and physical health you can focus on. Once you make the decision to improve your wellness, let your friends and loved ones know what you have decided and ask them to support you in reaching your goals.

For people who have a mental illness, there are some physical health conditions that occur more often than for people without a mental illness. The reasons are many and have to do with a variety of causes. Some of these causes you can change (e.g., your diet and exercise routine), and others you cannot (e.g., your age, gender, or family history).

The following causes for health problems can be changed (an easy way to remember what you need to focus on is to think of your ABC's):

**A** **1c LEVEL**  
Hemoglobin A1c is a component of your blood that carries sugar. Getting an A1c lab test can tell you if you are at risk for developing diabetes. If your A1c level is high, you can take steps to reduce it.

**B** **LOOD PRESSURE LEVEL AND BODY MASS INDEX SCORE**  
Your blood pressure is a good measure of cardiac health. If your blood pressure is high, it puts a lot of stress on your heart, which is not healthy. However, you can take several steps to reduce your blood pressure. Sometimes, medication may be required to get your blood pressure under control. The Body Mass Index (BMI) is a measure of body fat based on your height and weight. If your BMI score is high, you are at risk for developing heart disease and diabetes. Changes to your exercise plan and your eating habits can help reduce your weight and therefore reduce your risks.

**C** **HOLESTEROL LEVEL**  
Cholesterol is a fatty substance found in blood. Certain types of cholesterol are beneficial to the body and other types are not. If the bad forms of cholesterol are at high levels in your blood, it can lead to heart disease. Measuring cholesterol is done through a lab test. If your level is high, you can reduce it by making changes to your eating habits. Medication can also be helpful in controlling cholesterol levels in the blood.



## THE ROLE OF DIET AND EXERCISE IN YOUR WELLNESS PLAN

Now that you understand your ABC's, you should keep two more letters in mind: D and E, which stand for diet and exercise:

### D IET

The good news is a diet that is healthy for your mind is also healthy for your body. Eating well can make you feel better while providing increased energy to do the activities you want. Ask your doctor about following a healthy eating plan that includes whole grains, omega-3 fatty acids, fruits, and vegetables.

### E XERCISE

One of the best ways to improve how you feel, reduce stress, and sleep better is to exercise. Talk with your doctor about developing an exercise routine that works for you. Remember: Anything that gets you moving is going to be helpful. Take the stairs instead of an elevator, or walk to a bus stop further from your home. Research shows that exercising with a partner is more effective, so reach out to a friend or family member and exercise together.

## MORE HELPFUL WELLNESS TIPS

Measure progress toward your goals by using your own internal yardstick. You shouldn't compare your progress to someone else's or apply someone else's expectations for your progress. Instead, evaluate your progress based on what you have achieved today compared with how you were doing last week or month. Measuring this way allows for a more accurate description of your progress.

Learn how to manage stress in your life. Stress is often a trigger for increased symptoms or relapse because the brain of people with mental illness is highly sensitive to all sensory input. Overstimulation from the senses happens more easily for people with mental illness. Street noise, complex instructions, and rapid changes in the environment can lead to symptoms of an illness emerging. Knowing what triggers your symptoms and acting quickly to reduce stress when it emerges is vitally important.

Encourage your friends and family to educate themselves about your mental illness. By doing so, they will have a better understanding of the challenges of the illness. In addition, more knowledge should help reduce the stigma of mental illness.

## HOW DO I DISCUSS WELLNESS WITH MY HEALTHCARE TEAM?

Your healthcare team includes your mental health and physical health/primary care providers. It is important that everyone on your team talks to one another. So, do not be shy to ask your providers if they are talking with one another about your care and your plan for wellness. When you talk with your healthcare team, ask about your ABC's and discuss with them what your test results mean so you can make choices about how to move forward in achieving your wellness goals. Here are some other tips for talking with your healthcare team:

***Be Prepared.*** Before your healthcare appointment, make a list of concerns that you want to bring up with your provider. Don't be afraid to ask follow-up questions if you don't completely understand your provider's responses. You may want to keep a medical notebook where you can jot down questions or thoughts that come up between visits, track side effects, and keep a chart listing medication refill dates.

***Do Your Research.*** If you have been diagnosed with a specific medical condition, learn as much as you can about it from credible sources before your next appointment.

***Don't Be Embarrassed.*** If you feel shy about addressing a problem with your healthcare provider, don't forget that you are not the first person to experience this problem; the provider has probably heard it all before. Just like any good relationship, trust and honesty are very important. The more open you are, the better the chance is that your healthcare provider will be able to partner with you on your road to health and offer you the best guidance.