

Whole Health: Integrative Care Starts With Me

What is Whole Health?

Whole Health is an approach to health care founded at the Veteran's Administration and rapidly gaining momentum within that system and beyond, that recognizes the whole person. Whole Health goes beyond illnesses, injuries, or disabilities. It focuses on health and well-being and includes self-care and complementary therapies (such as acupuncture, massage, and yoga), along with conventional medical care. In Whole Health care, the individual is empowered to take charge of their health and well-being and be a more active partner with the health care team. At its core, Whole Health:

- **Focuses on what matters most** to an individual, building upon a person's mission, aspirations, and purpose (MAP) in life.
- **Offers personalized care** specific to each individual in the context of their life.
- **Is proactive**, not only focusing on what is wrong, but also on prevention and self-care.
- **Is patient-driven**, encouraging the individual to be an active participant in the process.
- **Is about building relationships** between patients and healthcare professionals, family members, peers, and other members of an individual's community and social network.
- **Draws on the body's innate ability to heal**, no matter the condition by going beyond simply managing disease to supporting the whole person.
- **Is holistic**, supporting the whole person with physical, mental, and emotional health as well as with their relationships with others.
- **Is evidence-based**. Findings from research are respected and fully considered, as are other sources of information that are important to an individual.
- **Is inclusive** of an array of skills, tools, people, and programs. It draws from whatever is safe, effective, and consistent with the individual preferences.

How Are Whole Health and Integrative Health Related?

Whole health includes not only conventional clinical treatments, self-care strategies, and prevention, but also Complementary and Integrative Health (CIH) approaches. The term "Integrative Health" in its fullest sense, is also about strong relationships, empowerment through self-care, teamwork, prevention, and using a variety of therapeutic approaches to optimize health and healing. Integrative Health providers have a fund of additional knowledge and expertise, but ideally every clinician can be integrative in their approach.

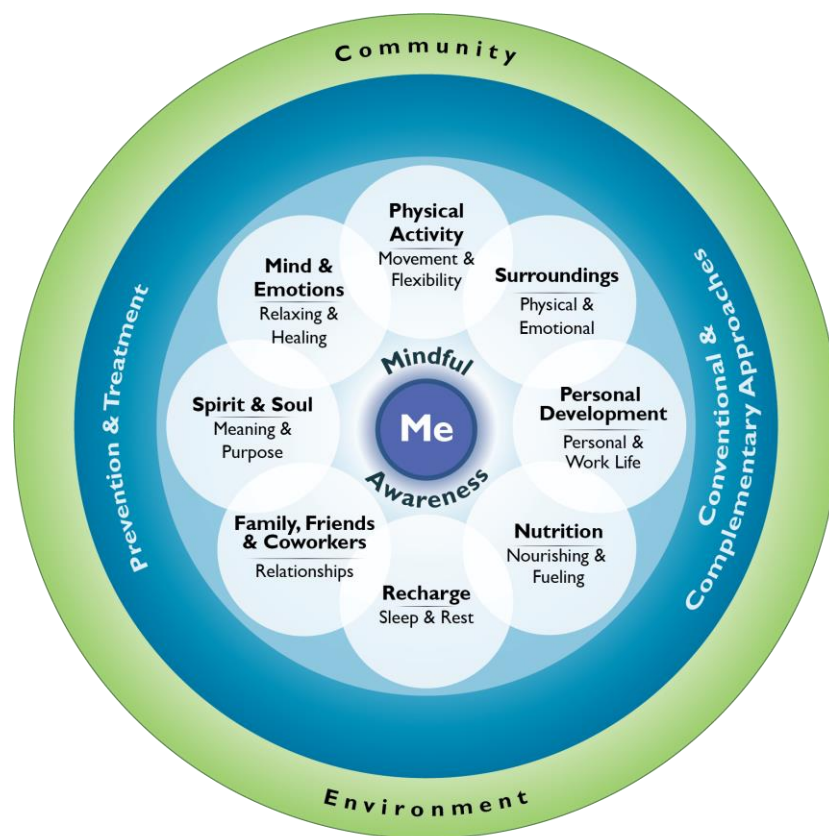
According to the Academic Consortium for Integrative Medicine and Health, "Integrative medicine reaffirms the importance of the relationship between practitioner and patient, focuses

on the whole person, is informed by the evidence, and makes use of all appropriate therapeutic and lifestyle approaches, healthcare professionals, and disciplines to achieve optimal health and healing.” Therapeutic approaches that may be classified as CIH include stress management, mindfulness, guided imagery, yoga, progressive muscle relaxation, massage therapy, art and music therapy, acupuncture, biofeedback, biofield therapies, and many others. Safety and efficacy are important factors in deciding what approaches are most appropriate, as are individual preferences. CIH is one of many important elements of Integrative (and Whole Health) care.

The Circle of Health: Me at the center

The Circle of Health pictured at right is designed to help you to think about your whole health. All of the areas of the circle are important. They are all connected. Improving one area can benefit other areas in your life and influence your overall physical, emotional, and mental health and well-being. The human body and mind have tremendous healing abilities, and we can strengthen these healing abilities.

- The inner circle represents **you**, your values and what really matters to you. Being in a state of **mindful awareness**, being fully aware, or paying attention, helps you see what matters to you. It allows you to make conscious proactive choices about every aspect of your health.
- The next circle is your **self-care**. These are circumstances and choices you make in your everyday life. See the section below “Self-care is the choices we make everyday”.
- The next ring out from the center represents all the **professional care** you receive – the care that is offered to you by others. Professional care may include tests, medications, supplements, surgeries, examinations, treatments, and counseling. It also includes complementary approaches, such as acupuncture and mind-body therapies.



The Circle of Health

The components of proactive health and well-being

- The outer ring represents your **community**, the people and groups to whom you are connected. Your community is even more than the places where you live, work, and worship. It includes the people and groups you connect with; your community is those who rely on you and upon whom you rely. This might include an online community, a support group, or even your connections with your environment.

Self-care is the choices we make everyday.

Research shows that the most important influence on how healthy you are is how you take care of yourself,² and you don't need a medical background to do that. Medical care is important, but how you live your life between medical appointments makes the most difference. However, self-care is not something you have to figure out on your own. In Whole Health care, you look at all areas of your life. You consider your values, lifestyle, habits, and motivations in each area. Taking stock of where you are now and where you want to be in each of these areas is the first step in living a healthier life. You may want to start with just one or two areas.

The areas of self-care include the following:

1. **Physical Activity - Movement & Flexibility** — Exercise and movement give you energy, flexibility, and strength. Exercise is also good for your mind. Regular exercise can lower blood pressure and cholesterol and reduce the risk for heart disease. Examples of physical activity include walking, gardening, dancing, or lifting weights. It is important to find what works for you.
2. **Surroundings - Physical & Emotional** — Your environment can affect your body and emotions. Things like clutter, noise, bad smells, poor lighting, or water quality may affect your safety and quality of life. You may be able to change some of these things, others you may not. It starts with paying attention to the influences of your environment on your life and health. Improve what you can. It's good to have a safe, comfortable, and healthy space.
3. **Personal Development – Personal & Work Life** — Your personal and work life is very important no matter where you are in life. How you spend your time and energy can give you energy or make you tired. Do you spend time doing what matters most to you? Learning and growing throughout your lifetime can have an impact of not only your happiness, but also your health.
4. **Nutrition – Nourishing & Fueling** — What you eat and drink can nourish your body and mind. Choose healthy eating habits that fit your lifestyle. Certain supplements can support your health goals. Limit alcohol, caffeine, and nicotine. Keep your body and mind properly fueled.
5. **Recharge – Sleep & Rest** — Sleep is very important for your body and mind. Rest can give you peace. Relaxation can lower stress. Activities you enjoy can help you feel recharged. A good balance between activity and rest improves your health and well-being.
6. **Family, Friends, & Co-Workers – Relationships** — Positive social relationships are healthy. Feeling alone can sometimes make you sick or keep you sick. Having good friends, positive relationships at work, or a healthy intimate relationship with a life partner can be source of strength. It's good to talk with people who care about you and listen to you.

7. **Spirit & Soul – Meaning & Purpose** — A sense of meaning and purpose in life is important to many people. When things are hard, where do you turn for strength and comfort? Some people turn to spiritual or religious faith. Some people find comfort in nature. Some connect with art, music, or prefer quiet time alone. Some want to help others. You may express this as a guide to living fully.
8. **Mind & Emotions – Relaxing & Healing** — Your mind affects your body. Sometimes when you think about stressful things, your heart rate and blood pressure go up. You can use the power of your mind to lower blood pressure or control pain. Learn to use the connection between your body, brain, and mind. Mind-body practices tap into the power of the mind to heal and cope.

More information is available on [our website](#) for each of these topics.

Discovering your MAP and developing your personal health goals

You are the expert on you! The first and most important step in creating your roadmap to your healthiest life is to step back from your health concerns, and think about your life. What really matters to you? What is your life's mission, aspiration, and/or purpose (MAP)? Why do you want or need your health?

Sometimes, it can be hard to figure this out. Using the [Personal Health Inventory](#) (PHI) is a good way to get started in understanding some of these questions. Read through the inventory, reflect on the Circle of Health components, relax and really think broadly and openly.

Will I continue to see my primary care provider?

Yes. Your primary care provider is an important member of your healthcare team. They may or may not specialize in or be familiar with Whole Health or Integrative Health. Regardless, you can discuss with them what is important to you for your health and well-being (see below "How do I get started with Whole Health?"). You may also seek out a provider that specializes in or has experience with Whole or Integrative Health while you continue to see your primary care provider and other team members. Integrative care providers may ask about what matters to you in your life so they can help you with your life goals. You may also receive more self-care support and be referred to complementary services like health coaching, yoga, acupuncture, and massage therapy if available in your medical center or community.

How will Whole Health help me?

There is no one way to help all people to be their healthiest and best. Each person is unique. In a Whole Health approach, health care teams get to know each individual person better and make sure that care is geared to each person's needs and goals. This personalized care is fundamental to Whole Health.

Is there a downside to Whole Health?

There is not a downside to Whole Health compared to the way you received care in the past. Ideally, it builds on all that works well in our health care system. Some questions may be new for you. You can choose what you share and how detailed your answers will be. It is likely that you will be very happy with Whole Health care, because your health care team will focus on you as an individual. People are more likely to follow a plan that they helped create and that is based on their own lives.

What can I do if I feel unsure about the Whole Health approach?

If you are uncertain or uncomfortable at any time with a Whole Health approach, talk with someone on your health care team. Ask questions, share your concerns, get more information. Let your health care team know what would be helpful to you.

How do I get started?

- Step #1: Help your health care team get to know you better. Tell them what really matters to you in your life: what makes you happy, and what you want your health for.
- Step #2: Talk to your health care team about your self-care. In what areas are you doing well? What are your natural strengths? What areas are challenges for you? Are there one or two areas on which you would like to focus?
- Step #3: Work with your health care team on a plan for your health. You are the expert on yourself—what you can do or cannot do, how you feel, how you want to live your life, what you want to accomplish. Your health care team can help you think through ways to improve your health that work for you. They can offer suggestions to improve your self-care. They can recommend strategies that fit your interests and lifestyle and the resources available in your area. They can help you set goals and identify steps along the way to reach those goals. Making changes in even one area can improve your health. Your team will support you as you work toward your goals and help you find other experts to help, if needed. They will also work with you to revise your plan over time as you accomplish goals or need to change them.

When can I start Whole Health?

You don't need to wait to get started. You can complete a [Personal Health Inventory](#) to explore what matters to you and what you want your health for. You can talk to a friend, family member, health coach, spiritual leader, or someone on your health care team about areas you want to work on. Share your interest in Whole Health with someone on your health care team today!

The information in this handout is general. **Please work with your health care team to use the information in the best way possible to promote your health and happiness.**

This handout was adapted by Sara Arscott, PhD, Education and Research Coordinator, for the University of Wisconsin Integrative Health Program from the original written for the Veterans Health Administration (VHA) Office of Patient Centered Care and Cultural Transformation (OPCC&CT) by Charlene Luchterhand MSSW, former Education and Research Coordinator, Integrative Health Program, University



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