

How to Use the Wellness Compass

The Wellness Compass is a tool you can use to get a personal reading on your overall health in 8 basic dimensions. The compass works on the principle that wellness is a state of balance across the different dimensions of our existence. Physical health is one of the dimensions of wellness, but it isn't the only dimension that matters.

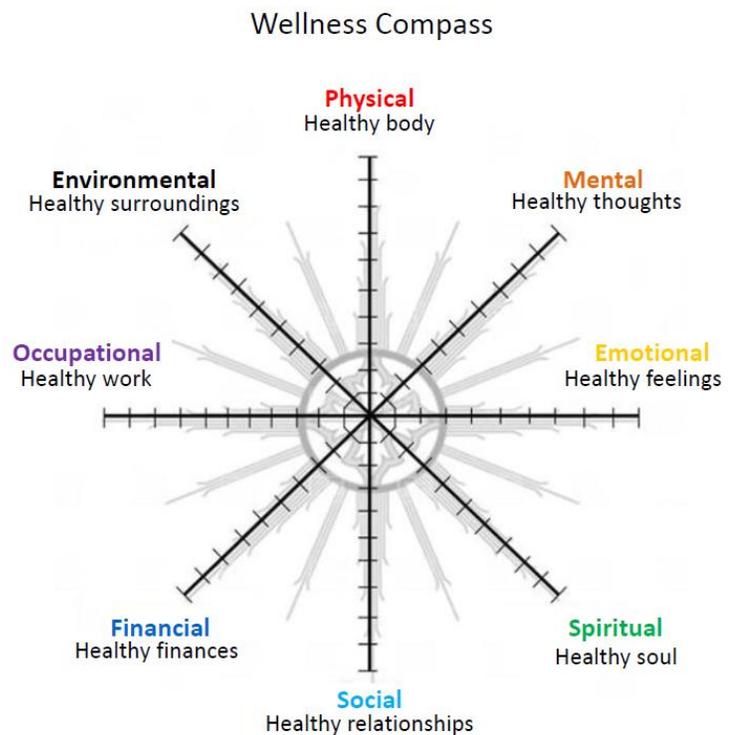
The theory stems from a belief that all these different dimensions of wellness affect and influence each other. If you are experiencing physical health issues, the root issues could lie in physical conditions, but the possibility is just as great that situations going on in other dimensions of your life could be impacting your physical health.

Many organizations use variations of this model to help describe health in a more holistic way. Other groups focus on different dimensions or define the dimensions differently to suit their uses.

The Wellness Compass is different. It is designed to help you visualize how you are doing along each of the different dimensions so that you can see where your health in one dimension may be affecting your health in another dimension. It can be used to gain insight from past experiences, or navigate personal change going forward in your life.

Using the Wellness Compass requires personal interpretation. How one person interprets their life in terms of the 8 dimensions doesn't have to match with another person's interpretations. The compass isn't used to compare one person's readings with another person's readings. The scoring only needs to be internally consistent.

Before use the Wellness Compass, it's important to understand it's a tool that can be helpful in a variety of scenarios. Besides helping you look at your current situation in relation to your view of optimum living, the Wellness Compass can be applied "pro-actively" to predict the effects a change you are



considering may have on your overall situation, and it can be useful “re-actively” to evaluate the effects a change you already made had on your overall sense of satisfaction with your life.

For optimal results, calibrate the Wellness Compass by clarifying what each of the 8 dimensions means to you. Think about your life as a whole and fit key aspects of your existence into each of the 8 dimensions on the dial of the compass. If you hit a topic that doesn’t have an obvious connection to one of the dimensions, then think deeper about which dimensions it might span. After narrowing to one or two dimensions, mentally assign that topic to the dimension where it most closely aligns. Or you can divide the topic into the needed number of categories so that the parts of the topic each align more easily. For example, if “work” was a topic that presented questions about where it fit into the 8 dimensions, you could decide to mentally map it into financial because it most directly affected your financial health. Alternatively, you could separate work into two sub-topics: social and financial. The social aspect having to do with contributing a valuable product or service to society and the financial aspect having to do with being paid wages for the contribution you made to a business venture. Splitting a topic like work into two or more of the dimensions on the compass helps you see how your work contributes to your overall wellness.

You could use the Wellness Compass to look at what the impact might be of going back to school, or what the impact has been of inviting a parent into your home to live. It can help avoid incomplete thinking about a change you are considering, or when you want to identify an unintended consequence that resulted from a change you thought would make your life more perfect. The Wellness Compass can assist you to understand the effect a change that was beyond your control has had on you; such as the loss of a loved one or job. The compass can help balance impressions of your situation by highlighting other perspectives that can be seen when viewed from the various dimensions. It also provides useful input when you are making plans, regardless of what the goal you’re seeking may be.

Step 1 – Rate how healthy you feel and think your life is in each dimension

Each dimension is ranked on an arbitrary scale that goes from 1 to 10, where 1 is the lowest (or worst health) rating and 10 is the highest (or best health) rating. The method used to determine the rating in each dimension is again personal. One person’s assessment rational need not match another person’s. The way in which you choose to assess and measure one dimension doesn’t have to match the way you measure another dimension. You rate each dimension separately according to your own view on how health in this aspect of life should be assessed.

Again, the compass is a very subjective tool, however these explanations and sample questions may help you determine how to rank your level of health in each dimension:

1. **Physical:** Recognizing the need to maintain physical wellbeing by caring for your body. Physical wellness can include a variety of health-related behaviors such as not smoking, being physically active, healthy eating, taking medication as directed and taking personal responsibility for your health care by getting assessment and treatment in a timely manner.

Questions to Consider:

Do I know important health numbers, like my cholesterol, weight, blood pressure, etc.?
Do I get annual physical exams and attend specialty appointments regularly?
Do I have an established exercise routine and healthy diet?
Do I get enough of sleep?

2. **Mental:** Recognizing the extent to which your thoughts are positive and focused on caring for yourself. The ability to assess situations logically and realistically, see options and make good choices for yourself. Recognizing your own creative abilities and finding ways to expand knowledge and grow intellectually. This can include maintaining an interesting in learning, valuing life-long learning and responding positively to intellectual challenges. A person with mental wellbeing uses the resources available to be support of one's self, expand one's knowledge, improve one's skills and abilities to govern one's thoughts to be affirmative and realistic.

Questions to Consider:

Am I in touch with my inner thoughts? Can I observe the way I think and determine if my thoughts are helpful or hurtful toward my wellbeing?
Do I make assessments and choices that lead me in healthy directions that I choose for myself?
Do I have the education I need to help me reach my full potential?
Do I engage in creative and stimulating activities that allow me to expand my knowledge?

3. **Emotional:** Coping with and managing your emotions in a constructive way that helps you understand your own feelings. This can include efficiently managing stress, maintaining a positive attitude, having high self-esteem and a strong sense of who you are as a person, and the ability to be recognize and express emotions.

Questions to Consider:

Do I cope with stress in a healthy way?
Am I able to adjust to change?
Am I content most of the time?
Do I enjoy life despite its occasional disappointments and frustrations?
Do I feel good about who I am?

4. **Spiritual:** Expanding a sense of purpose and meaning in life. Different people may have different views of what spiritualism is, but it is generally considered to be the search for meaning and purpose in human existence. The path to spiritual wellness may involve simply thinking through the ways you receive meaning in your life. In addition, some individuals have practices that

allow them to focus on the meaning in their lives and can include meditation, prayer, yoga, or other specific spiritual practices that support your connection to a higher power or belief system with or without organized religion.

Questions to Consider:

- Do I have clearly defined values, beliefs, and morals?
- Does my life have a sense of personal fulfillment and meaning?
- Do I apply my values to my actions and decisions?
- Do I make time for prayer or meditation?

5. **Social:** Developing and maintaining healthy relationships that lead to a sense of connection and belonging. This can help you establish and build a strong support system while providing you with positive interactions and the enjoyment of being with others.

Questions to Consider:

- Do I have close friendships and intimate relationships?
- Are my relationships with others positive and rewarding?
- Do I plan time to be with my family and friends?
- Do I ask for support when I need it?
- Do I care for others and allow others to care for me?

6. **Financial:** Satisfaction with your current and future financial situations. This includes being financial stable and prepared to deal with unexpected financial situations and expenses.

Questions to Consider:

- Do I make enough money to financially support myself and my family?
- Do I have money saved in case of emergency or financial crisis?
- Am I in debt beyond what I can reasonably pay back?
- Do I have a financial plan for the future?

7. **Occupational:** Personal satisfaction and enrichment from one's work. This includes developing a sense of your strengths, skills, values and interests for your career.

Questions to Consider:

- Does my career give me a sense of fulfillment or purpose?
- Is my career/job well aligned with my skills, abilities, and interests?
- Do I feel as though you enjoy your work most days?
- Do I have a manageable workload?

8. **Environmental:** Living and working in surroundings that encourage good health by occupying pleasant, stimulating environments that support well-being and knowing how the environment of your surrounding impacts you.

Questions to Consider:

- Do I live in a safe and healthy environment?
- Am I able to function efficiently and effectively in my living space?
- Do my surroundings contribute to my well-being?
- Am I contributing to the health of the environment around me?

Step 2 – Connect the dots

Draw a line around the face of the compass in a clockwise or counter-clockwise direction. The resulting shape will look like some sort of octagon if straight lines are used to make the connections or a circle if you use curves.

Step 3 – Interpret the meaning of the resulting “compass reading”

If the shape indicates good overall balance (a similar score in each dimension), then you may want to consider the level of wellness being achieved. If all areas are scoring a low rating, then you may find that you would benefit from pushing yourself to expand your horizons in several directions. The reverse could also be true. For some people, seeing a shape that results from scoring 10 in every dimension might indicate that they could be expending too much effort, therefore, a decreasing adjustment may be helpful.

The shape could have low spots or high spots. These dips may reveal connections. Two low values may suggest a relationship across two dimensions of your health. For example, it could be that your financial health is affecting your physical health. You may determine that reducing your debt might help you lose weight because you overeat when you are stressed about not being able to pay your bills. One high and one low value may reveal an inverse relationship between two dimensions. For example, a very high score in occupational health and a low score in financial health may mean that you are not putting your skills to use in an optimal way.

The compass reading helps you assess if your life is in balance or not, if you are making choices and decisions that are taking you in the right direction.

Step 4 – Formulate a plan for change

The shape of the compass reading should point to areas where change could lead to improved wellness overall. Your assessment is personal and requires that you develop your own insight about the meaning of the compass reading and direction in which it is pointing.



Determine the change you believe will create movement in the desired direction. Write down what you need to do differently. Describe the need as a problem you want to address. Set a goal that is specific, measurable, actionable, reasonable, and has time constraint included.

Step 5 – Do your plan

Do what you planned you would do. Keep track as you go, to see if you are following the plan.

Step 6 – Repeat another Wellness Compass reading

Over time, and as you work through your plan, take another compass reading. See where you stand at the end of each day, or each week, or each month. Take another compass reading after completing your plan to help you identify what your next plan should be. Also note how well you followed your plan. Study how things went and what outcomes resulted. Did things improve? Were you right about how to achieve the change needed in your overall health? If the plan wasn't successful, what else could you try? If you were successful, is there a new area of imbalance you now need to address?