

Spiritual wellness: A journey toward wholeness

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Through spirituality, we connect with the world around us.

Editor's note: This is the last installment in a 10-article series on wellness. You can read all of articles in the series at americannursetoday.com/category/wellness101/. Thank you to the authors at The Ohio State University College of Nursing for their support of nurse wellness.

HAVE you ever felt like a “human doing” instead of a “human being”? As we fling ourselves from one activity to another, we sometimes find that getting beyond our list of “to do’s” and staying in touch with those aspects of our lives that mean the most to us is difficult. Remember that well-rounded self-care also involves spiritual wellness.

What is spirituality?

Barbara Dossey, a pioneer in the holistic nursing move-

ment, writes that our spirituality involves a sense of connection outside ourselves and includes our values, meaning, and purpose. Your spiritual well-being isn't what you own, your job, or even your physical health. It's about what inspires you, what gives you hope, and what you feel strongly about. Your spirit is the seat of your deepest values and character. Whether or not you practice a religion, you can recognize that a part of you exists beyond the analytical thinking of your intellect; it's the part of you that feels, makes value judgments, and ponders your connection to others, to your moral values, and to the world. For this reason, spirituality frequently is discussed in terms of a search. Spiritual wellness is a continuing journey of seeking out answers and connections and seeing things in new ways. It also means finding your purpose in life and staying aligned with it.

Although religion and spirituality can be connected, they're different. A faith community or organized religion can give you an outlet for your spirituality, but religion isn't spirituality's only expression. Hope, love, joy, meaning, purpose, connection, appreciation of



Continue the journey

Here are some ideas to consider as you continue your nursing journey. You'll notice that many are connected to recommendations we've made for other dimensions of wellness. This isn't a mistake. We're whole human beings, and these practices support multiple dimensions.

Reconnect/reimagine your life's purpose and passion:

Set aside some time for a "retreat with yourself" to carefully consider your purpose and whether/how you're living it out. Where do you need to make adjustments? What do you need to stop doing? What do you need to start doing? What would you do in the next 5 to 10 years if you knew that you couldn't fail? Periodically "taking stock" is critical to staying on track.

Ramp up your positive outlook: In their work with people newly diagnosed with HIV, Moskowitz and colleagues developed an intervention to improve patients' emotional outlook even in the midst of a very challenging circumstance. The intervention involves cultivating positive emotions through these daily practices:

- Recognize a positive event each day.
- Savor that event and log it in a journal or tell someone about it.
- Start a daily gratitude journal.
- List a personal strength and note how you used it.
- Set an attainable goal and note your progress.
- Report a relatively minor stress and list ways to reappraise the event positively.
- Recognize and practice small acts of kindness daily.
- Practice mindfulness, focusing on the here and now rather than the past or future.

Results were promising and showed that, over time, the positive effects increased. Cultivating an "attitude of gratitude" is cited by many spiritual leaders from multiple faith traditions as essential to their daily practice.

Consider some kind of meditative practice: Traditional forms of meditation can include prayer, chanting, or sitting in stillness with a quiet mind. Some people prefer physical action that incorporates meditation, such as yoga, tai chi, gardening, or simply walking. Experiment to find what works for you.

beauty, and caring and compassion for others are associated with spiritual well-being.

Spirituality as part of nurses' DNA

As nurses we're fortunate that the very basis of our practice is grounded in spiritual ideals. From the beginning of our education, we learn about the importance of spirituality in relation to a person's overall health. Even our ethics emphasize the value of a spiri-

tual connection. Provision 1 of the *Code of Ethics for Nurses with Interpretive Statements* states, "The nurse practices with compassion and respect for the inherent dignity, worth, and unique attributes of every person." But many nurses are surprised to find that Provision 5 extends this compassion and respect to nurses themselves: "The nurse owes the same duties to the self as to others, including the responsibility to promote health and safety, preserve wholeness of character and integrity, maintain competence, and continue personal and professional growth." We have a responsibility to both our patients and to ourselves to honor our spiritual heritage.

Think about your job and what you do every day. When do you feel most energized? Great satisfaction can come from learning a new skill and mastering it, and of course it's vital that you complete your many tasks efficiently and competently, but there's more. When asked about the times they felt most energized, many nurses cite moments when they really connected with another person—family, friends, colleagues, patients. This is the "more"—when we go beyond just our needs and wants to connect beyond ourselves. Humans are wired to be in relationship with others. Spirituality is fundamental to nursing practice.

Disconnected much?

Although most nurses would likely agree that spirituality is an important component in the care they provide and in their personal lives, too often the pressures of modern life interfere with what's most important to us. Crushing workloads, family responsibilities, financial pressures, and fast-paced living create the perfect storm that makes acting on our values difficult. Many nurses suffer chronic illnesses, including depression, at a rate greater than the general population and other health professionals. In a study, Letvak and colleagues demonstrated that nurses are twice as depressed as the patients they serve. A study by Melnyk and colleagues of more than 2,000 nurses across the country found more than half of the nurses reported poor mental or physical health and depression. Additionally, nurses with "...worse health were associated with 26% to 71% higher likelihood of having medical errors."

Living life on purpose

In his groundbreaking work with professional athletes, performance psychologist Jim Loehr, EdD, argues that being out of touch with our life's purpose creates an extraordinary energy drain. People may run in marathons, eat the healthiest foods, and be at the top of their game professionally, but these really good things can become an end to themselves when they're disconnected from life's purpose. Without that connection, anything can become meaningless.

History is replete with ordinary humans rising to challenges of the day in extraordinary ways.

Loehr writes: “When you find—or, more aptly, choose—your purpose, then you are the agent of your own happiness. You have the opportunity to harvest joy in both the pursuit and the achievement, the journey and the destination.” Our purpose, our reason for living on this planet, is at the foundation of our spiritual nature.

Joy in the journey

All of us experience tragedy, sadness, and grief; they're part of the human condition. If you're wondering if finding joy and peace is possible under what appear to be impossible conditions, remember this: History is replete with ordinary humans rising to challenges of the day in extraordinary ways. They were able to unlock that part of themselves that gave them the strength and courage to carry on.

Nurses are extraordinary—don't lose sight of the amazing work you do to improve the lives and comfort of the people you touch. It's never too late to make a positive change in your life. (See *Continue the journey*.) If you take a few small steps in the direction you want to go, you'll be amazed at the results. ★

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waved over the device. Patients also can show their ID card and request alternative screening.

Keeping pace with technology

The LP represents a profound change in pacemaker technology. More literature is needed to provide nurses with the education they need to keep up with these innovations. Currently, LPs are limited to right ventricular pacing; however, other implanted cardiac devices are being investigated that will work in combination with the LP for use in other areas of the heart. ★

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