

8 Habits for Establishing a Holistic Well-Being for Students

Seven Texas A&M University - San Antonio faculty and staff members share their expertise on ways in which students can enhance their overall wellness.

While college can be exciting, there are some typical adjustments that occur during the first year that can be stressful including adjusting to academic demands, acclimating to a new environment, and navigating new responsibilities. College is full of joys, disappointments, challenges, successes, and many transitions. Establishing skills for wellness now will help serve students for a lifetime.

The term 'wellness' is multi-faceted and encompasses a range of domains, including physical, social, environmental, emotional, intellectual, occupational, financial, and spiritual wellness. Wellness is a skill that can be learned and practiced, similar to learning to speak a second language. This article provides an overview of eight wellness domains and includes practical tips students can implement to maximize well-being in each respective domain.



1) Physical Wellness

Find a balance between physical activity and proper nutrition

Physical wellness involves a healthy balance between one's physical activity and proper nutrition. Typically, when individuals hear the phrase "physical activity," they likely think of exercising or going to the gym. However, there are a variety of different ways to be physically active without going to the gym. Examples include taking the stairs vs. the elevator, going on a nature walk, cycling, backpacking, canoeing, and hiking, to name a few.

As a member of the Jaguar family, students have access to a number of wellness activities and programs through the Department of Recreational Sports. Students are encouraged to take advantage of programs such as Intramural Sports. Rec Sports offers a variety of team competition activities such as soccer, flag football and basketball in men's, women's, and co-recreational formats. Rec Sports also offers single player competitions in billiards, table tennis, and a variety of video games. Lastly, Rec Sports offers a number of group fitness classes such as Zumba, Yoga, and Kettlebell AMPD!

As you start your college career, Rec Sports wants students to consider something that many individuals forget about with their hectic schedules: nutrition. Beginning Fall 2020, Rec Sports will be unveiling a new nutritional program for our campus community! This program will provide students with baseline nutritional statistics, help create unique meal plans based on individual goals, and assist in developing a meal plan around unique individual food needs. Rec Sports wants to provide a valuable tool for students to utilize during their first year that will help them learn what they are putting into their bodies.

2) Social Wellness

Build healthy, supportive, and nurturing relationships

Social Wellness refers to how individuals interact with others and the relationships they form. Social wellness is developed by building healthy, supportive, and nurturing relationships in addition to creating a genuine connection with those around you. Conscious actions assist individuals with learning how to balance their social life with their academic and professional lives. At Texas A&M University-San Antonio, the department of Student Involvement provides students the opportunity to develop their social wellness.

All A&M - San Antonio students are welcomed to the campus with a Welcome Week full of activities in the Fall and Spring semesters. Welcome Week activities provide students the opportunity to meet fellow peers at a variety of social events to begin developing healthy peer-to-peer relationships. In addition to

Welcome Week events, the Student Involvement office collaborates with other areas to provide the First 50 Days program. During the first 50 days of the semester, there are a variety of programs designed to assist students with respect to diversity, time management, learning how to constructively express ideas/thoughts, and how to develop healthy relationships. In addition to planning activities throughout the year, the department of Student Involvement also manages all the registered student organizations on campus. This is where students can meet fellow peers with similar interests to further develop their social wellness on campus.

In addition, the Student Involvement office also develops and manages leadership programs for students that will help them obtain their Cisneros Leadership Certificate. Topics for the leadership programs include understanding strengths, developing a personal mission statement, diversity in leadership, financial literacy, and much more. The leadership certificate offers an opportunity for students to develop a sense of self and enhance their social wellness to be a productive member of the university community and beyond. For more information on how to get involved with a student organization on campus visit: <https://jagsync.tamusa.edu/organizations>

3) Environmental Wellness

Practice habits that promote a healthy environment

Environmental wellness:

- is the ability to recognize one's responsibility for the quality of the environment surrounding us,
- promotes interaction with nature and one's personal environment, and
- encourages students to practice habits that promote a healthy environment and a more balanced lifestyle.

At A&M - San Antonio, the department of Student Involvement, as well as the *Mays Center for Experiential Learning and Community Engagement*, work to develop Environmental Wellness by promoting service events to students such as "Choose. Act. Impact." MLK Day of Service, and other volunteer opportunities that help impact one's physical environment and develop respect for the environment around them. These activities allow students to build awareness and connect with the surrounding environment to create positive change that will impact both the campus and surrounding community.

Student Involvement at A&M - San Antonio promotes the use of the SafeZone App to allow students to take proactive steps to promote their own safety and the safety of others. The Student Government Association (SGA) works with the University Police Department (UPD) to conduct annual safety walks with officers

to determine areas on campus that could be improved to create a safer environment for students. In addition to the safety of the student environment, Student Involvement works with a variety of student organizations and campus offices to create programs that promote sustainability initiatives and volunteerism on campus. For more information on service opportunities on campus visit: <https://jagsync.tamusa.edu/service-opportunities>

4) Emotional Wellness

Develop awareness of one's thoughts, emotions, and behaviors

Emotional wellness involves being aware of and in tune to one's thoughts, emotions, and behaviors. The more aware individuals are of their thoughts, emotions, and behaviors, the more in control they will feel managing them. It is common for many individuals to experience emotional distress upon transitioning to college including symptoms of anxiety, depression, eating concerns, academic distress, and familial concerns.

A useful tool to help individuals tune into their emotional well-being is a YouTube video series entitled "*Nourish to Flourish*." These are 3-minute videos developed by the Office of Student Counseling & Wellness Services (SC&WS) that include a variety of tips for anxiety management and healthy relationships: https://www.youtube.com/channel/UC_ZwXUAuS2K8WiAOIFfnn3A.

Individuals interested in seeking professional assistance from a licensed mental health counselor can contact the Office of Student Counseling & Wellness Services, www.tamusa.edu/studentcounseling. Common presenting concerns the Office of Student Counseling & Wellness Services might see include anxiety, depression, interpersonal relationships, self-esteem, substance use, and grief and loss concerns. Mental health services are free for currently enrolled students, confidential (as the law allows), and are not part of a student's academic or university record.

5) Intellectual Wellness

Stay organized, avoid multi-tasking, and set a schedule

The Student Academic Success Center offers a variety of services to students at the A&M - San Antonio campus. The services are academic coaching, tutoring for Math and Science courses, Supplemental Instruction for certain Biology and Chemistry courses, and much more. The Student Academic Success Center offers students ways to prepare for this new learning environment (whether you are taking in-person or online courses). Here are a few practical tips:

- **Stay organized**
 - Whether a student is taking in-person or online classes, the grid below is an example of how individuals can organize themselves to make sure they are on top of all of their assignments/requirements.
 - This grid can also assist students if there is a major change in the semester.

	Class 1	Class 2	Class 3
Important Dates			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Paper Due Friday
Big Changes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No lab • Live Lectures but class online 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Discussion Board Posting Optional • Recorded Lectures 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • May do paper instead of research project
Important Links	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lecture link • Office Hours link 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Discussion link • Lecture link 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Group paper folder

- **Avoid multi-tasking**
 - If students are doing more work on their own and time is less structured, they might be more tempted to multitask. Many people think they can do multiple things at once, when research indicates that multitasking reduces efficiency and performance and minimizes overall productivity.
- **Set a schedule**
 - Setting a schedule can help provide structure and keep students motivated. Try something like the example below to organize your time. Include time for exercise and self-care. Here is an example of a [schedule template](#).
 - Stick to the instructor's schedule as much as possible. Staying on a schedule will help students have a feeling of normalcy and prevent them from falling behind.

6) Occupational Wellness

Explore which occupational opportunities suit you best

Occupational Wellness means a healthy balance between work, life, and family. In order to gain this, students have to reduce and prevent stress, and strive for satisfaction in life through working. Many college students have busy lives

between all of their responsibilities, and the *Mays Center for Experiential Learning and Community Engagement* is here to help students make achieving their career goals as smooth as possible.

Occupational Wellness requires one to build a career that is financially rewarding and matches individuals' skills, interests, values, strengths and lifestyle. Therefore, students are encouraged to explore what occupational opportunities are out there and which opportunities suit you best by actively participating in experiential learning. It is vital that students balance their work, academic, and personal lives, so they can avoid burn-out. For instance, students can begin building their occupational wellness now by having a job on campus or working in a part/full time job while going to school. Keep in mind that occupational wellness allows individuals to develop unique skill sets in order to have a career that is fulfilling and one that they are passionate about in today's information age.

Here are some tips to increase occupational wellness:

- Develop an impact mission to feel good about the work accomplished,
- Find role models in your field (*LinkedIn* is a great tool),
- Love what you do, do what you love and enjoy it,
- Explore work opportunities that interest you,
- Balance your work with both leisure and family time,
- Talk to a Career Advisor if you feel stuck, and
- Visit the *Mays Center for Experiential Learning and Community Engagement* to learn ways to evaluate your career options, build your network, recognize your strengths, and help design your life.

7) **Financial Wellness**

Learn how the credit system works and how to make it work for you

Financial wellness is overall financial health and a lack of stress over money, which is a great goal to strive for. One of the most important things individuals can do for their financial wellness as a student is learn how the credit system works and how to make it work for you. Studies continue to show that students' knowledge about the credit system, along with other financial topics, has gone down in the past 20 years (Financial Industry Regulatory Authority, 2018), however, students continue to need and utilize credit. Using credit and applying for credit is likely something that is going to affect one's financial wellness for the rest of their life, thus learning about it now is the best time. Here is a brief, 11 minute presentation that goes through the basics of the credit system:

<https://youtu.be/VjJxmBZJbjo>

Many students assume they have no credit, but for those who have taken out loans in their name, they actually do have credit. The loans signed up for after submitting and accepting FAFSA funding will be reported to the credit bureaus, and this may be surprising, but only 15% of one's credit score is actually the length of one's credit history. The largest piece, 35%, is whether or not individuals pay their bills on time. Therefore, as long as individuals maintain their payments after graduation, they will have a simple way of building credit.

Here are some tips to increase one's financial wellness:

- Track one's debt, credit, and spending with an app such as Mint,
- Schedule an appointment with a Money Coach,
- Visit the Mays Center to learn ways to create a personalized money plan (www.tamusa.edu/mays).

8) Spiritual Wellness

Carve out time to be still each day

With classes, homework, jobs, and balancing friends and family, individuals can easily become too busy to pause and check in with themselves. Set aside 5-10 minutes a day to be still and connect with yourself and/or your higher power. There are many ways individuals can practice stillness. Here are two examples:

When trying to be still, our minds tend to wander. In guided meditation, another person provides direction to help redirect our thoughts back to center. Researchers found that just 10 minutes of guided meditation a day through smartphone apps can improve mental health (Flatt et al., 2019). YouTube also provides a variety of guided meditations in different lengths to fit one's schedule, such as:

10-Minute Meditation for Anxiety - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=O-6f5wQXSu8>

10-Minute Meditation for Sleep - https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aEqIQvczMJQ&list=RDCMUCEMArgthHuEtX-04qL_8puQ&index=2

Praying can reduce anxiety (Anderson & Nunnelley, 2016). Place a sticky note on a bathroom mirror to remind oneself to communicate with a higher power. Prayers of gratitude can be especially helpful, as gratitude can help individuals feel happier and hopeful (Witvliet, 2016). Try to be as specific as possible when naming that for which you are thankful. For example, "Thank you for the fun time that I spent with my classmates today."

References

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