

Think You're Healthy? Would You Know if You Weren't?

Written by Ginny Grimsley
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Oncologist Offers 7 Tips for Increasing Awareness

Not too long ago – just after World War II – few people in the United States brushed their teeth with any regularity. Now, the mere thought of going an entire day or night without brushing one's teeth is simply out of the question for most.

Hopefully, someday in the near future, a similar attitude will prevail regarding mental well-being, says Dr. Matt Mumber, an oncologist and author of "Sustainable Wellness: An Integrative Approach to Transform Your Mind, Body, and Spirit," (www.sustainablewellnessonline.com), coauthored by Yoga therapist Heather Reed.

"Human happiness and well-being are rudderless without *awareness*, which I define as the quality of paying attention to what's going on in the present moment from an inquisitive, nonjudgmental and focused perspective," he says.

An easy way to think of optimal wellbeing might be to envision a three-legged stool, says Reed.

"The three legs include physical activity, nutrition and that underappreciated component missing from too many Americans' lives – stress management, or a healthy mental state," she says.

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After checking off a healthy diet and exercise from the list, how does one go about ensuring a healthy mind? Mumber and Reed say the key is *mindfulness*, which they define as paying attention on purpose, non-judgmentally and as though your life depended on it. Framed another way, mindfulness means focusing on something without trying to change it, like the sky holding passing clouds without clinging to them.

They describe the states necessary for attaining mindfulness:

- **Beginner's mind** is the ability to see things with new eyes. The Bible warns against putting new wine in old wine skins – doing so risks tainting the new stock. A beginner's mind opens people to the world of possibilities that exist in the present moment. That does not mean throwing away good ideas from the past; rather, it means to entertain new ideas with a truly open sensibility.

- **Trust:** Believe in your authority to know your own body, thoughts and feelings. We need to have the confidence necessary to trust that our thoughts and feelings at any given moment have value.

- **Non-judging** is the ability to see things for what they are, to hold an open and neutral place for whatever comes up within and around you, without thinking of anything as categorically better or worse than anything else.

- **Patience** is a willingness to continue with the process of paying attention on purpose even when it appears that no progress is being made. Learning and growing through mindful practice happens with time, and we can't force the outcome.

- **Acceptance** refers to allowing whatever comes up in the moment to be held in our field of awareness. This is not the same as giving up or being passive; acceptance is merely acknowledgement.

- **Letting go** is refusing to attach to specific thoughts, feelings or behaviors. This can feel like

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losing something, but every time we let go, we open ourselves to something new and, potentially, deeper.

• **Non-striving:** In our goal-oriented society, this may seem counterintuitive. However, non-striving refers only to practicing mindfulness without expectation of some future goal or dream, which helps us better live in the now.

“By having our three-legged stool firmly planted in awareness, we can drop into what we typically call a sense of *spiritual* wellbeing,” says Mumber.

About Matt Mumber, MD & Heather Reed

Matt Mumber, MD, is a practicing board-certified radiation oncologist with the Harbin Clinic in Rome, Ga. He completed his radiation oncology residency at Wake Forest University Bowman Gray School of Medicine and graduated from the Associate Fellowship Program in Integrative Medicine at the University of Arizona. Dr. Mumber is past president of the Georgia Society of Clinical Oncology. He founded Cancer Navigators Inc, a non-profit organization offering cancer patients access to nurse navigation, social services and educational programs to support and augment the clinical care they receive. Dr. Mumber received the Hamilton Jordan Founders Award for involvement in statewide oncology activities and in 2008 he was named a Health Care Hero by Georgia Trend magazine.