



The Athena Wellness Podcast
Episode 212 – Reimagining Midlife Wellness – Part I
July 19, 2023

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[00:00:05] Kathy Robinson: Welcome to The Athena Wellness Podcast, the show that invites you to take a seat around the community fire and listen to stories that inspire. I'm your host, Kathy Robinson, author, coach and founder of Athena Wellness, a company that's dedicated to supporting you on your journey to live more wholeheartedly.

[00:00:30] Kathy: Hello and welcome friends. Thanks so much for joining me for this shortened Wellness Wednesday episode, a little midweek boost to help keep your Warrior Vibe high.

Today's show is a Walking The Talk vancast, a look behind the scenes into what I'm learning and working through along with a takeaway for you. These portable episodes are informal and casual, recorded on the go from wherever I happen to be at the time. And today I'm enjoying a beautiful morning close to home.

[00:01:03] Today we'll be exploring reimagining midlife wellness. This will be a multi-part series that will continue for the next several months.

I thought this topic would be of interest for several reasons. First, it's important to stay well in times of transition and it's vital to stay well as we get older. Vitality is



essential if we're going to make the most of our next chapter. And lastly, wellness will look different for each of you. So this is an opportunity to re-examine some of the things that you've been doing and maybe make changes or implement some new wellness practices.

In this series, I'll share some thoughts and give you a framework to define what matters most to you at this stage of your life along with ways to continue to take positive action to be well.

[00:01:58] Let's start with the words *wellness* and *well-being*. These words are often used interchangeably. But I believe there's a difference between the two.

I think of *wellness* as the choices we make and the actions we take that create our lifestyle. It's an ongoing journey that evolves over time.

Well-being is the experience of the positive wellness actions we take. It's how we feel as a result of our choices and actions. Just think about how you feel after a good workout.

Optimal well-being is where you want to head directionally. It includes things like life satisfaction and happiness. It's our overall engagement with life, something I call wellth, W-E-L-L-T-H.

To sum it up, *wellness* is what we do. *Well-being* is how we feel as a result. And *optimal well-being* is the aspiration.



Wellness is also fluid. It's a series of ongoing adjustments to the practices that keep you well. I've found that every five years or so I make new choices. For example, my mid-50s were all about endurance sports. And now it's all about strength, flexibility and balance - elements to keep me functional as I get older.

I also like to think of wellness as a form of self-respect. Self-respect is the byproduct of when you honor yourself by embracing wellness as a vital and ongoing process of making choices to create a healthy, integrated and fulfilling life.

No matter your age or your level of wellness, you can enhance your vitality and well-being by reconnecting with yourself and taking small steps toward wholehearted living. It's never too early nor too late to begin.

I like to think of living wholeheartedly as being well so you can fully embrace who you are to do the things that lights you up with the people you love. That's an exciting way to welcome a new chapter of life. Throughout this series of talks, we'll be exploring how to enjoy this journey, because I believe that our best years are ahead.

[00:04:30] So what are the essential elements of well-being? When we think of being well, we typically think of food and exercise. But there's a lot more to well-being.



This idea of well-being dates back to the middle of the last century, when the idea of good health was not just the absence of disease, but a state of physical, mental and social well-being, my definition of living wholeheartedly.

Another definition that I like was shared by my colleague, Dr. Robyn McIntyre, the co-creator of a wellness model that we like to use in our respective work. She has said that good health is a continual striving to live a life that's full, meaningful, zestful and exuberant.

While there are many models, Dr. Robyn and I choose to emphasize six components that we think contribute to holistic well-being, the ones that consider the whole person. This model also features lines that connect each of the six elements to highlight the interconnectivity and interdependency of well-being.

The first three tenants are probably most familiar: mind, body, and spirit, which are individual or inward looking. If we're being truly holistic, we think it's important to consider a second group of three which are outside of us. And these are concentric spheres of family, however you choose to define it, community and environment.

Balance comes into play here. Underperforming in any of these areas will not achieve well-being. Conversely, overdoing one or several areas at the expense of the others can have adverse effects. So it follows that our daily micro-decisions are really important and cumulative.



[00:06:32] We should never underestimate the power we have to alter our health trajectory, which leads us to another model I created with Dr. Robyn called the Wellness Continuum, which relates to our physical health.

Here's the main tenet of my wellness philosophy: The body's natural tendency is toward health and self-healing. And I'll say that again because I believe it's that important. Our body's natural tendency is toward health and self-healing.

I once had a wellness professional on the podcast who said, "When you cut your arm, you don't need to tell it how to heal." That's what I mean by our natural state of wellness, trusting the body to self-regulate and doing all we can to support that process.

If our natural state of wellness is our starting point, we can think of wellness on a continuum, where we can move toward well-being or impaired wellness by the choices we make. Consistent healthy choices move us toward optimal well-being, while sub-optimal choices can move us toward chronic illness.

In subsequent talks, we'll explore some simple wellness strategies and practices that can move us toward optimal well-being, but today, let's talk about two big drivers of what can push us into the red zone toward chronic illness.

The first is stress, which is a broad term that includes the feeling of overwhelm and mental and emotional pressure. Stress moves us into the red zone by something called the caveman response to danger or "fight or flight." When we're in that



state, the body releases the stress hormone cortisol and we're ready to take on the cause of danger or run from it. This is good, but we're rarely in acute danger.

But cortisol is also released when we're chronically stressed, and these chemicals have impact. They may result in chronic headaches, tension and pain in the neck, chest and shoulders. It can cause rapid heartbeat, raised blood pressure and anxiety. And all of these can lead to more chronic and critical health issues.

Stress can also cause breath holding in tense situations. There have been studies on email apnea, where people hold their breath as they're checking their email, which the body reads as stress and triggers the "fight or flight" response. Think about how many times a day you check your email.

The second driver is social isolation. And we've learned a lot about this in the last few years. The findings are a little alarming. Social isolation can shift us toward chronically impaired wellness with an increased risk of Alzheimer's, substance abuse, stroke and heart disease. Studies are showing that being isolated socially can lead to serious effects on physical and mental health, with more impact on mortality than smoking, obesity, excessive alcohol, or physical inactivity.

[00:10:07] Now that we've talked about our physical and mental wellness, let's take a look at some macro trends that can negatively impact our well-being and move us from the green to the red.

There are numerous potential impacts on our well-being, but here are a few to consider. The first are midlife challenges, new life events that require our time and



shift our focus, such as changes in the workplace, retirement, relationship challenges, bereavement, and physical and mental health issues.

The second is an increased velocity of change. This requires us to rapidly adapt and use new technology and innovations while being hyper-stimulated in a 24/7 barrage of information that's doubling at increasing rates.

And lastly, disconnection. The technological distraction and dependency challenges us to remain connected to who we really are, what we feel, what matters, and the world around us.

Keep in mind that it's not the shifts, trends or the events themselves. It's not about escaping our experience. It's more about learning to adapt to these challenges in a way that keeps us moving toward the optimal well-being aspiration.

[00:11:37] We're going to explore strategies and actions to optimize your well-being in upcoming sessions, but I'll leave you with a few questions for you to work with until then.

You can work with them in a number of ways. You can journal, walk, contemplate, and take positive action in small steps. Be playful and hold them lightly, but do spend some time identifying what's important to you at this stage of life.

Here are the questions and you can download them in the PDF transcription of this episode by clicking on a link in the show notes:

1. How do you define wellness and well-being for yourself?



2. How has your wellness changed over time?
3. Which well-being elements of mind, body, spirit, family, community and environment do you routinely support?
4. Where can you focus more effort?
5. Where do you currently fall on the wellness continuum?
6. What might move you toward optimal well-being?
7. What does well-being look like for you in your next chapter?

I'll be back in the next vancast with the next installment of reimagining midlife wellness with some strategies on how to optimize your well-being. Until then, work with the suggested questions and be well!

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[00:13:15] Kathy: Thank you so much for joining me today. I know there are many ways you can spend your time. Thank you for choosing to spend it with me. Until our paths cross again, be kind to yourself and show your Warrior Spirit some love.

If you know anyone who could benefit from today's episode, please pass it on. And many thanks for supporting the show by subscribing and leaving a review. It means a lot and it helps others find their way to our circle.

If you'd like to access the show notes, have a question you'd like addressed on a future episode, or would like a transcript of this episode, visit www.AthenaWellness.com/podcast.

Until next time, be well!



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