

The Holistic Path to Revitalisation

True vitality transcends isolated treatments by embracing a harmonious blend of nutrition, movement, mindfulness and purposeful living.



Text: Chow Ee-Tan. Images: Courtesy of Freepik.

In today's fast-paced world, the pursuit of optimal health becomes fragmented when many are focusing solely on isolated symptoms or quick fixes. However, as we navigate the complexities of modern living, prioritising holistic wellness becomes not only a means of preventing illness but also a pathway

to thriving in all aspects of life. True vitality and wellbeing stem from a holistic perspective of a dynamic equilibrium encompassing physical, mental, emotional and spiritual aspects.

This approach emphasises positive self-care, empowering individuals to become active participants in their

own wellbeing rather than passive recipients of medical interventions. Through the nurturing and integration of various modalities, such as nutrition, sleep, functional movement and stress strategies, we can unlock our innate potential and resilience to improve our wellbeing and embark on a journey of self-discovery and healing.

Calibre speaks to three health and wellness experts to explore the principles and practices of holistic health, guiding us on a transformative journey towards rejuvenating our health from within.

A HOLISTIC OUTLOOK

Maizan Mansor, Director and Principal Educator of Amanjiwa Sanctuary, a movement and wellness studio in Perth, Australia, says health and wellness could mean different things to different people.

“For the younger demographic, it may mean having lots of energy to work and play hard and do anything they want to enjoy life. Wellness is the general ‘feel good’ status of being young and active. For the more mature demographic, health means having good results from routine health checks and having no major issues with the common diseases. Wellness has a broader meaning at this stage; it means having the energy and satisfaction to go through each day despite the challenges brought by life circumstances.”

The Blue Zones

For a holistic approach to health, Maizan recommends studying and applying the 9 Principles of the Blue Zones in the world.

The Blue Zones are regions around the world where people tend to live longer and healthier lives. These areas have been extensively studied by researchers to uncover the secret of longevity and wellbeing. It was found that there are nine common principles that contribute to health and vitality:

- 1 MOVE NATURALLY:** Daily physical activity is integrated into daily life through activities like walking, gardening or manual labour rather than relying solely on structured exercise routines.
- 2 PURPOSE:** Have a sense of purpose to wake up in the morning, whether it is through work, family or community involvement. Having a clear sense of purpose provides motivation and fulfilment.
- 3 DOWNSHIFT:** Stress management is crucial for overall health, Practise relaxation techniques such as prayer and meditation or simply take time to unwind and enjoy life’s simple pleasures.
- 4 80 PER CENT RULE:** This principle emphasises eating mindfully and stopping when you’re about 80 per cent full. Eating in moderation can help maintain a healthy weight and reduce the risk of chronic diseases.
- 5 PLANT SLANT:** Blue Zone diets are predominantly plant-based, with a focus on fruits, vegetables, whole grains, beans and nuts. These foods are rich in nutrients and antioxidants.
- 6 WINE AT 5:** Moderate alcohol consumption, particularly red wine, is often enjoyed at meals in the company of friends and family.
- 7 A SENSE OF BELONGING:** Strong social connections and a sense of belonging promote wellbeing, such as spending time with loved ones, participating in community activities and maintaining close relationships.
- 8 LOVED ONES FIRST:** Family is prioritised with a strong emphasis on maintaining close ties across generations. Elders are respected and valued for their wisdom and experience.
- 9 RIGHT TRIBE:** Surround oneself with like-minded individuals and belong to social circles that reinforce healthy habits and provide emotional support.



A certified educator in pilates, hatha yoga and qigong, Maizan says people consider themselves 'healthy' because they are free from diseases and trauma, but they can also suffer from other problems such as weak joints, occasional gastrointestinal discomfort or weight management issues. These are signs that the body's homeostasis (balance) is being lost over time.

To her, holistic health encompasses three broad categories: physical health, mental/emotional health and social/spiritual health. "The basis of physical health means one is free from disease, free from trauma or at least able to recover from trauma quickly and easily. This can only come from a foundation of looking after our physical vessels. Physical health is very much affected by our lifestyle, which includes the food we eat and exercise."

She says the word 'equanimity' describes what mental health is, which is the state of psychological composure and stability where we remain undisturbed by experiences and are exposed to emotions of anger, pain and self-doubt.

"When one is balanced mentally or emotionally, they can handle the stresses of life, feel confident in their own abilities and learn and adapt well to make their own unique contribution to the world they live in. The operative word here is 'balance'—balance in both our physical and mental health to be truly healthy," she says, adding that the Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM) and Ayurvedic Medicine principles are holistic wellbeing systems designed to address every aspect of our lives and bring us into balance.



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Maizan says three of the principles she often highlights to her clients are having strong and close connections to friends and family, having a purpose and belonging to a community with common interests or faith. The other principles relate to movement, managing stress, a strong sense of purpose and eating well, which integrate well into the above factors of physical and mental health.

"By integrating and practising these principles, we can achieve physical, mental and spiritual wellbeing. If you drop one of the three factors above, you can see how a gap might manifest in disease, mental health issues we often hear about, such as depression and anxiety and because of isolation,

as we saw after Covid, including a sense of loss, loneliness and self-doubt.

Maizan spends the first session with her clients to understand their goals and then set expectations as to what can be done to achieve their goals. They then agree on a plan that involves a combination of movement therapy (yoga, pilates, strength training, etc.), breathwork, sound massage therapy and more.

"Nutritional advice may be the next stage if needed, as many people do come in with some acute or chronic pains, especially in the gut. Gut health is something that has a huge impact on overall health and is attracting more attention from the medical community. Our immune systems depend heavily on the state of our gut microbiome. Psychoneuroimmunology is an area of study that links the effect of the mind on health and immunity, whereby immunity is in turn affected by the health of our gut," she says.

Her clients can achieve balance with a commitment to these initial steps, and then it is a process of constantly adapting to changes. She would adapt the programmes to help her clients adapt to these changes in their lives, and to help them create, maintain and cultivate a well-balanced lifestyle.

"One way to continue pursuing a holistic approach to health is by surrounding ourselves with like-minded people who can support and help us when we lose track or interest. However, maintaining health and wellbeing for the span of our lives is highly dependent on making that effort for ourselves," she says.

STEPS TOWARDS A HOLISTIC HUMAN

One can only become a holistic human by embracing a holistic approach to health that addresses different aspects of wellbeing, says Dr Yong Kuan Yew, a medical doctor who is the CEO and founder of Holistic Human, a company in Singapore providing coaching and training services.

He says addressing only one aspect of wellbeing and ignoring the others is like cutting the stem of a weed but leaving the roots behind. It will sprout back and cover your health ‘lawn’ in no time. So, a holistic approach to health will lead to a state of peak performance. This includes being physically fit, mentally resilient and emotionally balanced.

“We are deeply connected to our inner selves, and we need to understand our strength and purpose with clarity,” he says. “Setbacks in life are mere stepping stones; with our mind, body and spirit in perfect harmony, we can navigate a life of wellness.”



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The Five Pillars of Becoming a Holistic Human

Dr Yong says the path to becoming a holistic human consists of five steps, and they are:

<p>Step 1</p> <p>Build the body. Exercise regularly, be properly nourished, have adequate sleep and have a balanced microbiome.</p>	<p>Step 2</p> <p>Heal the heart. Acknowledge and resolve emotional wounds and traumas.</p>	<p>Step 3</p> <p>Train the mind. Conquer self-doubt, master our thoughts and let go of self-limiting beliefs.</p>	<p>Step 4</p> <p>Lift our life force. Harness the energy within, fostering vitality and wellbeing.</p>	<p>Step 5</p> <p>Soar our spirits. Align spiritually, tap into our potential, be in touch with our inner wisdom and live with passion and purpose.</p>
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Dr Yong says we should not be just passive observers of life but active agents of positive change, utilising our strengths for the betterment of ourselves, our families and our communities. “If the eventual outcome of eating right, exercising, meditating and cultivating the right mindset only serves to avoid illness or disease, we are merely escaping pain and that is not motivating,” he says.

He explains that the concept of a holistic human is a state of peak performance when a person’s mind, body and soul are in alignment. When a person is actualised (as defined by Maslow), he has reached his full potential and thrives and flourishes in his environment.

A holistic human blooms when the 6 Petals of Health™ are tended to and nurtured, he says. The six petals are physical fitness, mental resilience, emotional equilibrium, social connection, bioenergetic harmony and spiritual alignment.

Cultivating these six petals is the linchpin and secret to thriving, not just surviving.

“Reforming our health is transformative and rewarding,” he says. “For it is only when we are in our best physical, emotional and mental health that we are bathed in positive emotions, engaged with the world in work or hobby, able to develop deep and meaningful relationships, able to find meaning and purpose in our lives and able to achieve our goals through cultivating and applying our strength and talents.”

INTEGRATIVE MEDICINE FOR HOLISTIC BEING

Dr Janethy Balakrishnan, Founder and President of the Association of Integrative Medicine Malaysia (AIMM), goes one step further and says that a holistic approach to health addresses the full range of physical, emotional, mental, psychosocial, socio-economic,



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spiritual, occupational, intellectual and environmental influences that shape a person’s health.


“Holistic health isn’t just about treating illness; it’s also about preventing disease and promoting wellness. Integrative medicine often emphasises lifestyle factors such as nutrition, exercise, stress management and sleep hygiene to prevent chronic diseases like diabetes, heart disease and obesity,” she says.

She explains that integrative medicine is the proper terminology for holistic health and wellbeing. It is a paradigm shift from

a disease-centred approach to a more patient-centred, holistic model of care. It is about mind-body-soul connection, empowerment and education and personalised medicine with a synergistic combination of traditional and complementary medicine, based on research and evidence-based practices.

“All these are important because we do not just treat patients’ symptoms but also investigate the root cause of disease. “The goal is to achieve optimal health and wellbeing throughout our lives,” she says, adding that AIMM’s collective mission to promote healing, prevent illness and enhance the quality of life for individuals around the globe is more critical now than ever before.

Dr Janethy is passionate about integrative medicine, as it stands for a system that harnesses the body’s innate healing power. It also emphasises respect for the human capacity for healing and the importance of the relationship between the practitioner and the patient.

“This patient-centred model, which is also known as a participatory or personalised collaborative model, is a practice that stands for ‘what is best for the patient’. We believe in empowering our patients, because health is a basic human right and everyone’s responsibility,” she says. “Healthcare should not be just delivered but greatly encouraged by well-informed self-care. We must relearn the evolving medical knowledge and invest in continuous lifelong education.” 



Four Modalities to Cultivate Holistic Health



The ancient wisdom of “healthy mind, healthy body” rings true—cultivating holistic health requires nurturing various interconnected aspects through mindful practices encompassing restorative sleep, functional movement, nourishing nutrition and effective stress management strategies.

SLEEP

“Good sleep hygiene is a fundamental component of health and wellbeing,” says Dr Janethy. She says sleep deprivation has negative effects on hormonal regulation, natural detoxification, appetite (ghrelin and leptin), weight management, memory, the immune system and energy levels. Thus, the circadian rhythm is important for REM (deep) sleep, as autophagy is an important process. Make it a top priority to optimise your sleeping schedule, such as a consistent bedtime around 10:00 a.m. to 11:00 p.m., and ensure a good quality of sleep for 7 to 8 hours.

Quality sleep supports immune function, cognitive performance, mood regulation and hormone balance. If you wake up in the morning refreshed, restored and energised, then you have had a good sleep. Try to establish a consistent sleep schedule, create a relaxing bedtime routine, limit screen time before sleep and ensure your sleep environment is conducive to restfulness.

FUNCTIONAL MOVEMENT

“Functional movement requires that we engage the core muscles as we engage in basic movements involving multiple joints in multiple planes and using a full, active range of motion. There are seven movements required in functional movement patterns, including squat, lunge, hinge, push, pull, carry and rotate,” suggests Maizan.

We should be performing activities to improve strength, flexibility, balance and mobility by incorporating functional movements into our daily routine. This can help prevent injuries, enhance physical performance and promote overall functional fitness.

Focus on exercises that engage multiple muscle groups and movement patterns, such as squats, lunges, lifts, push-ups and yoga poses. Listen to your body progress gradually and seek guidance from qualified fitness professionals to develop a personalised exercise programme tailored to your needs and goals.

NUTRITION

Proper nutrition is the foundation of holistic health, providing essential nutrients to fuel your body and support your cellular function. Aim for a balanced diet rich in whole, nutrient-dense foods such as fruits, vegetables, lean proteins, whole grains, healthy fats and legumes. Minimise consumption of processed foods, sugary snacks and excessive alcohol; all these can contribute to inflammation and chronic health conditions. Stay hydrated by drinking plenty of water throughout the day. Consider incorporating mindful eating practices to cultivate a positive relationship with food and improve digestion.

“Our vegetables chosen should also represent colours of the rainbow, e.g., purple or orange sweet potatoes, kale, red peppers and some spices (turmeric or ginger as good anti-inflammatory agents). Preparation of a

well-balanced meal requires planning and an understanding of macro- and micronutrients,” says Maizan.

Dr Janethy says that when needed, a radical nutritional intervention, which is not common advice, can be advocated by experienced medical practitioners who are continuously seeking solutions to slow down the negative consequences of ageing. “Eat according to your own biochemistry, physiology and metabolism. One man’s food is another man’s poison. To lower body fat, caloric restriction can be carried out with intermittent fasting, low carbohydrate and high saturated fat diets (nutritional ketosis).”

STRESS STRATEGIES

Stress happens when we find ourselves outside our comfort zone, when our abilities are challenged. “Our body responds by providing the resources required to handle such situations by increasing the heart rate, breathing rate and blood glucose—the fight or flight response. When we conquer obstacles in our lives, we expand our comfort zone. In life, that’s how surmounting tough situations makes us grow. But when stress becomes overwhelming, we need to recognise it and seek appropriate help,” says Dr Yong.

Indeed, chronic stress can have profound effects on physical and mental wellbeing, impacting everything from immune function to cardiovascular health. It’s important to implement stress-reduction techniques to promote relaxation, resilience and emotional balance.

Activities such as meditation, deep breathing exercises, muscle relaxation, yoga, tai chi or even a walk in nature can help reduce stress levels and promote a sense of calm. Nourish your mind, body and spirit by spending time with loved ones, pursuing hobbies, practising gratitude and setting boundaries to protect your mental and emotional health.