

reMEMber



September

2010

Great Fun At Danny Again

ME Association Patient Survey

Research News from America - Dr Cheney
by Karl Krysko

The Heart of Well-being by Jan Alcoe

My Story by Kristina Richards

Life Without Stress

Dates For Your Diary

The Heart of Well-Being

'The Heart of Well being'.

Learning how to recover, protect and improve personal well-being

The Heart of Well-being is a new self-help publication which takes a unique approach to developing well-being. Not only does it explain why using certain tools will improve how we feel and how we approach life – physically, mentally, emotionally and spiritually – but it provides opportunities to really notice how we feel and to experience these benefits in two ways: first, through simple activities and practices which can be incorporated into everyday living; and, more unusually, through a collection of inspiring audio commentaries. The tracks enable the listener to relax, tune in and begin to experience the way that different aspects of well-being feel, as a basis for lasting personal change.

Jan Alcoe's first book *Lifting Your Spirits* was written for people facing serious illness. This second publication is for a broader audience, including those people suffering from stress, chronic ill health and those who just want to get more out of life. As a registered hypnotherapist, Jan uses her experience of working with a wide range of people who are struggling with physical, mental and emotional problems, and her personal experience of serious illness and recovery to offer a way of improving well-being for all.

The impetus behind *The Heart of Well-being* was the recognition of the ways in which well-being gets challenged and eroded in day-to-day life. Individuals can find some days more trying than others, when they get out of bed on 'the wrong side', small hassles mount up and they lose their sense of balance and perspective. Many people suffer from work-related stress or have problems in health, relationships, family life or personal finances. Sometimes they may find themselves coping with an unexpected change or trauma, for example, a redundancy, the end of a relationship, an accident or diagnosis of illness. Even positive

experiences like holidays and new babies can have their stressful side.

What is Well-being?

When we ask people to describe well-being they rarely use words connected with physical health, but rather, talk about energy, motivation, enjoyment, fulfilment, peace, focus, inspiration and other words which touch on many facets of our being. Even someone with chronic or terminal illness can experience well-being. Whereas 'health' is about objective perceptions of our physical functioning, well-being is more subjective – it is about how we 'feel' on many dimensions.



The **physical** dimension is the experience of our physical body and incorporates physical energy, activity and functioning.

The **mental** dimension of well-being concerns the way in which we think and use our mind to make sense of what is happening around us, solve problems, develop strategies for action, and learn from those decisions.

The **emotional** dimension involves our very human capacity to feel – whether this is happiness, joy and contentment, or sadness, guilt and anger – and to understand and manage those emotions.

Spiritual well-being is our ability to feel connected and through this, to find meaning in our lives. We can feel connected with our inner selves by coming to understand the beliefs and values which guide us. We can also feel connected to 'something' or 'some being' greater than the self, for example, family or community, nature, all living beings, universal energy; or, through spiritual or religious practice, with God or the Divine.

These four dimensions of well-being overlap and interact, so that when we make a change in any one of them, this change will impact on the other three. A single negative event can spark off a whole series of negative

events, as the examples below illustrate:

'I worry about my workload and can't stop thinking about the things I have to do (mental). My sleep suffers and I feel really tired in the day (physical). I get short-tempered with colleagues (emotional) and just don't feel part of the team any more (spiritual).'

Alternatively, a positive change in one dimension of well-being can prompt a series of positive events in the others:

'I recently joined a choir and it's made me feel like I'm part of something again (spiritual). The singing seems to have reduced the pain I experience from my arthritis (physical) and all the laughing we do has given me a lift (emotional). I'm even beginning to get my head around reading music! (mental).'

When our well-being is compromised, we can withdraw, experience isolation and become more self-centred in our thoughts and actions. On the other hand, when we experience a sense of well-being, we feel more in touch with the needs and welfare of other individuals, our communities and our environment. We can then act in a way that expresses our higher values and, in doing so, feel fulfilment and meaning in what we do, as the following example illustrates:

'The main thing I do to sustain my well-being is exercise (physical), particularly windsurfing. When I'm windsurfing I switch off from all the stress of studying (mental) and let go of upsets and frustrations (emotional). I like being in the water and sometimes feel a deep connection and oneness with nature (spiritual). I've met new friends through windsurfing (community) and we have formed a group to protest against pollution at sea (environmental).'

In order to experience well-being, we can see that each of the four dimensions needs to be addressed so that we can create a balanced whole. If we are physically unwell, we can still redress the balance by enhancing our well-being on the emotional, mental and spiritual levels. Well-being is essentially about how we relate *inwards* to ourselves and come to understand ourselves through the four dimensions. There are further aspects of well-being, which is how we relate *outwards* – to others, our community and our environment, as shown by the outer rings of the well-being diagram.

Seven tools

Enhancing well-being across all dimensions gives people a sense of 'wholeness' and balance. They discover a more authentic 'being' within themselves which can begin to have a clearer voice in what they feel, think and do. It is this sense of wholeness which helps individuals to stay resilient in the face of everything that life brings, and discover lasting happiness. *The Heart of Well-being* offers seven tools which the individual can try out in order to begin to build their resilience:

1. Relax and tune in
2. Use your imagination
3. Think positively
4. Be creative
5. Lighten up
6. Value yourself
7. Discover peace

Throughout the book there are also opportunities to 'audit' aspects of personal well-being, create a personal vision of well-being and develop simple plans to improve well-being on every level.

Each tool is briefly described :

Relax and tune in

'When I relax, I can take a step back and see the wood for the trees'.

The ability to relax and tune into ourselves is very much at the heart of well-being. In our busy world and busy lives, we can become anxious, fearful, worried and angry as stresses build up. We can also find ourselves losing

our sense of perspective as we become caught up in our own emotions and those of others. We know that the effects of long-term stress are damaging to physical, emotional and mental health. In addition, they can lead to our losing a sense of what is important in life, and turning away from supportive connections with others.

The *Relax and tune in* tool provides a framework for individuals to consider to what extent they are meeting their basic human needs for safety, control, fulfilment, intimacy etc and then to learn how to deeply relax and tune in to how they are feeling at regular intervals throughout the day. Triggering the relaxation response is not only beneficial for physical health, but it enables us to maintain a sense of calm when responding to life's demands and make clear decisions about priorities and alternative courses of action. The activities and CD track *Relaxing stream* help the individual to relax deeply and to notice how they are feeling on each dimension of well-being.

Use your imagination *I like to picture myself performing well in difficult situations. It gives me confidence to do it for real.'*

Our imagination is a uniquely human gift which we can use to improve our well-being and to cope with challenges in our lives. However, we can also use it to dwell on past, bad experiences or create future 'disasters', adversely affecting our health and sense of well-being in the process.

This tool is based on using visualisation or positive imagery to envisage how we would like to feel, think and act, and what we would like to achieve. It is about using all the senses to create a positive vision of how we would like things to be. The activities and CD track provide the user with a framework to create visualisations which can focus on handling difficult situations, improving motivation and performance, clarifying thinking, boosting immune function and other physical functions, deepening spiritual connection, or just enhancing all aspects of well-being.

Think positively *'I appreciate who I am and expect the best in life'*

What we think shapes the way we experience life and well-being on all dimensions. While the pessimist believes that their troubles will last forever, affect everything they do and are caused by failings in themselves, an optimist interprets difficult times as temporary, specific to one situation and unconnected to shortcomings of their own. The pessimist will even put a negative 'spin' on a good event, seeing it as unrelated to their own strengths and actions, and unlikely to last for very long. This tendency towards a sense of helplessness means that pessimists are eight times more likely to experience poorer physical health, shorter lives and rockier relationships than optimists.

Learning to think positively puts us back in touch with our own strengths in the face of any challenge, enabling us to bounce back from adversity. Negative thinking is an unconscious habit which we can begin to notice when we are relaxed and tuned in. We can then challenge thoughts that are not helpful to us, thoughts like, 'I'm hopeless' or, 'Everything's terrible!' Once we get into the way of disputing these kinds of thoughts, we can begin to generate more resourceful ones. *Think positively* offers a simple model for doing this and for then noticing how energy and positive expectation follows.

The accompanying CD track, *Film Director*, offers a way of transforming negative thinking patterns while in a deeply relaxed state, as if they were old, out-of-date films playing on a screen. The listener can experience being their own film director, creating new, feel-good 'thought films' on the big screen!

Be creative *'When I am being creative, I feel truly alive'*

Being creative fills us with energy and enthusiasm. It provides a way of expressing our relationship with the world and giving voice to our feelings and experience. It engages the right side of the brain which is concerned with imagination, colour, rhythm and spatial awareness, rather than the logic, lists and rational analysis which occupy the left side of the brain. When we 'by-pass' the busy, thinking mind by getting absorbed in day-dreaming or creative activity, we are not only able to express and learn about ourselves as unique human beings, but to generate new ideas

and solutions to our problems and challenges.

The CD track *Creative garden* takes the listener into a restful, dreamy state of consciousness, providing an experience of creativity and also of problem-solving which can be taken back into work or leisure. A range of creative activities are suggested, from mind mapping to messy play and poetry which the individual can dip into as a way of stimulating the creative process.

Lighten up *'When I laugh, everything seems easier'*

Learning to see the lighter side in any situation by allowing play and laughter into our lives lifts our own mood as well as the mood of those around us. When we are beset by difficulties, we can compound our anxiety or despair by the way we go about our roles and tasks. This tool is about learning to be 'play-full' in the way in which we engage with life, even during challenging times. Lightening up allows us to drop the roles and masks we wear and bring more of who we truly are to the fore. Not only does it reduce tension, stress and negative emotions, but it helps us see what is important and develop a sense of community with others.

'I play golf with my mates. It means a lot to me – not to win the game but to be part of the group, sharing a joke and laughing at myself when a shot goes wrong. It's good to get out in the fresh air and enjoy the views, but it's the fun we have that I really enjoy and makes me feel good. All the tension of the week just slips away.'

In addition to activities which promote smiling, laughter and spontaneity, this section of *Heart of Well-being* contains a CD track called 'Snow play'. This provides the listener with an experience of what it is like as a child to wake up and discover it has snowed – re-discovering a child's sense of wonder, joy, freedom and the sense of camaraderie between friends, as the child joins their friends to play in a snowy scene.

Value yourself *'When I nurture myself, I begin to grow in confidence and self-respect'*

How we view ourselves, how we describe ourselves and how we look after ourselves are central to our feeling of well-being. This lays the foundation for recovery, self-discovery and positive change.

Self-care is not just about looking after our physical body, although giving ourselves wholesome food, sufficient sleep and regular exercise is an important component. It is about giving ourselves a chance to renew and heal on all levels – physical, mental, emotional and spiritual. Making time for self-nurturing fosters our self-esteem and self-respect. Self-esteem comes from valuing ourselves and recognising what makes us special. When we begin to recognise our own worth and use our personal strengths more consciously, we feel fulfilled and can begin to see the goodness in others. This builds mutual respect and improves our relationships.

Value yourself provides an opportunity to get back in touch with personal values and strengths and to identify sources of support. It provides a framework for a self-care plan which an individual can use to identify ways in which they can look after, treat and support themselves on all dimensions of well-being. The CD track *Hidden treasures* provides an experience of re-discovering strengths and qualities, and letting go of unwanted, old emotions.

Discover peace *'When I tap into the silence inside myself, I feel I can handle anything'*

There are times alone when we can enjoy our own company and get a sense of what it is like to be peaceful. It may be when we are relaxing in a bath or watching nature's beauty. These moments provide a glimpse of our natural, peaceful state that too often is elusive and transitory. Peacefulness is a quality we all have but have forgotten.

Discover peace introduces the practice of finding stillness through meditation, when we can begin to become more 'ourselves'. Rather than trying to still the mind, we can direct our thoughts towards a desired state of feeling, such as being peaceful, calm and content. Even a minute spent in this way takes our minds away from negative thoughts and any physical discomfort, leaving us feeling refreshed and clear-thinking.

On a deeper level, meditation is a journey of rediscovery of our inner selves, in particular our innate goodness. It can help us to surface some inner qualities such as love, courage or patience, which can strengthen and nurture us on every level. As we draw on these inner strengths, we become more self-reliant. We are less likely to be overwhelmed when things get tough, or be unduly influenced by others.

'Since I began to recover from depression, I've taken up embroidery. I find I get totally absorbed in the process – the colours of the threads, the shapes and textures which begin to form. I then begin to feel a real sense of quiet and stillness inside, which leaves me feeling I can cope with life.'

Discover peace provides a range of different ways of accessing a still, peaceful place within, from absorbing the mind in quiet activity to observing nature. The CD track *A peaceful place* provides the listener with an opportunity to create a place in their mind which can engender peaceful thoughts and feelings.

Making changes

The final section of *The Heart of Well-being* encourages the reader to go back to their original ratings of well-being and to reflect on any improvements which might have occurred as a result of using any of the tools. They are then invited to develop an achievable plan for enhancing well-being further by 'signing up' to three realistic changes they would like to make. For each change, they are asked to consider the following questions:

- How will it look and feel and what difference will it make?
- How will I do it?
- When will I do it?
- What support will I need to do it and to overcome any obstacles in the way?

Committing to and achieving some small steps can provide the self-confidence and positive feelings to take further steps and to make further use of the well-being tools in different areas of life. Above all, encouraging the individual to continue visualising themselves in a state of optimum well-being provides the unconscious template for these changes to take place. *The Heart of Well-being* is an easy read that encourages people to choose ways to improve their well-being by getting more in touch with their inner resources. It provides a holistic guide to well being that considers mind, body, emotion and spirit and our relationships with others and our environment. It suggests that by relaxing and using some of the attributes which make us uniquely human – our innate creativity, imagination, thought processes, and self-awareness - we can start to think and feel more hopeful, and create a better future for ourselves.

A major theme throughout the book is the importance of taking control over how we respond to life and our own self-care. The approach of being more responsible for our own health and well-being is a timely message as more emphasis on prevention is so needed today in health care.

The Heart of Well-being: seven tools for surviving and thriving is a unique self-help tool (a book and two CDs) for recovering, protecting and improving well-being. Written by Jan Alcoe and published by two charities - the Janki Foundation for Global Health Care and the British Holistic Medical Association - *The Heart of Well-being* offers practical help to really notice how you feel and begin to experience the benefits of enhanced well-being on all levels – physical, mental, emotional and spiritual.

The book and CDs are now available for purchase at £16 plus p & p. Profits go to supporting the work of both charities, including the support of two hospitals in Rajasthan, India.

Further information and purchase details can be found by clicking on http://www.hypnotherapyforliving.co.uk/the_heart_of_wellbeing.aspx or the enclosed flyer

The Heart of Well-being follows on from Jan's first book and CDs called ***Lifting Your Spirits: seven tools for coping with illness***, details of which can be found by clicking on http://www.hypnotherapyforliving.co.uk/lifting_your_spirits.aspx This was published by the Janki Foundation in 2008.

Jan Alcoe, Hypnotherapy for Living, 401 Ditchling Road, Brighton BN1 6XB
Tel 01273 504574/07774 758202 Clinics in Brighton (Kempton and Surrenden area)
Web www.hypnotherapyforliving.co.uk