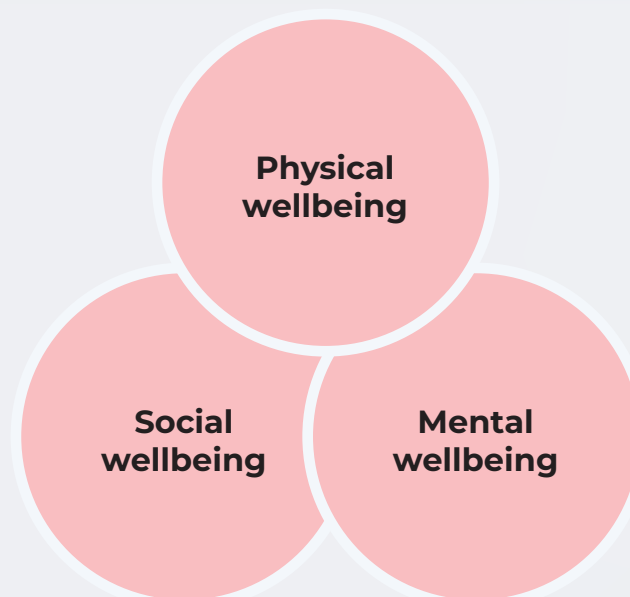




The holistic view of health

The World Health Organization (WHO) definition promotes a **holistic** view of health. This means that physical, mental and social aspects of life are seen as interdependent – they all influence each other.

- This approach recognises that health is more than just not being ill.
- Someone with a long-term disease can still experience good wellbeing if their care and support meet their needs.
- Treatments are increasingly holistic. For example, mild depression might be treated with counselling or group exercise (addressing mental and social needs) instead of just medication (addressing physical needs).



Illness and disease

Illness is about how a person feels. Disease is a specific, diagnosable condition.

- An individual can feel ill without having a diagnosable disease. They may have symptoms like tiredness or aches, but tests find no specific cause. This can be frustrating as the feeling of illness is very real.
- Conversely, a person might have a disease but not feel ill, especially in its early stages.
- Illness is a personal experience. Two people with the same disease, such as a common cold, may experience it very differently depending on their symptoms, their attitude, and how they choose to respond to being unwell.

Key terms

Health

A state of complete physical, mental and social wellbeing and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity (World Health Organization).

Illness

A feeling or experience of ill health that is entirely personal to the individual.

Disease

A disorder usually with specific signs or symptoms.

Wellbeing

The state of being happy, healthy and thriving, with good mental health, high life satisfaction, a sense of purpose and the ability to manage stress.

Varying views of health and wellbeing

How we understand health, illness, disease and wellbeing changes depending on our culture, the time we live in, and our life stage.

Culture

Culture is the shared attitudes, values and beliefs of a group.

For example, in some Western cultures, hearing voices is often seen as a symptom of a mental health condition like schizophrenia.

In some other cultures, such as in parts of India and Africa, it can be seen as a positive spiritual experience.

Time

Views can change over time as society develops new knowledge and attitudes.

For example, historically, disability was often viewed through a 'medical model', focusing on 'curing' a person or hiding them away.

Today, the 'social model' of disability is more common. This model argues that it is society's barriers (like discrimination or lack of access) that negatively impact a person's life, not the disability itself.

Life stages

Experiences of health vary across an individual's life stages.

For example, there is an expectation that the risk of certain illnesses and diseases increases as people enter later adulthood.

Physical activity is known to reduce this risk. The type of recommended activity changes with age, from play in childhood to walking and swimming in later adulthood.