

# What is health?

PH1.1: Identify physical, mental, and social health



- 1) Think about the last 24 hours of your life. At what point did you feel most healthy? Why?
- 2) In the last 24 hours, when did you feel least healthy? Why?
- 3) Jot down your personal definition for “health.”

DISCUSS

With a partner, share your responses. Then, discuss what the word health means to each of you.



Think about how the following definitions compare to *your* definition of health:

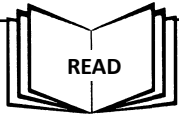
- The word health originates from the word *hale* (Old English) which means “wholeness, being whole, sound or well.”
- The World Health Organization (WHO) defines “health” as: “a state of complete physical, mental, and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity”

The 3 components of health in the WHO definition include:

- 1) **Physical health (PH):** This refers to the well-being of the body including absence of illness, injury, or pain. Well-being of the body includes but is not limited to diet, exercise, sleep, getting recommended medical check-ups, and taking safety precautions.
- 2) **Mental health (MH):** The WHO defines this as “a state of well-being in which an individual realizes his or her own abilities, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and is able to make a contribution to his or her community.”

**3) Social health (SH):** “Social health” refers to the dimension of health that deals with relationships and interactions with other humans. Having people to turn to for support and to share in life experiences contributes to overall well-being.

*Note: While mental, physical, and social health will be the main lens through which we analyze well-being, some health scientists say that other dimensions of health should be recognized equally. These include environmental, spiritual, intellectual, emotional, occupational, sexual, and financial health. What do you think?*



The components of our social, mental, and physical health are not separate, isolated parts of our health. Read the short article below to learn about how researchers are uncovering connections between our mental and physical health.

### **Mental Stress May Lead to Heart Disease**

Jan. 11, 2006 — Most people believe that stress plays a role in heart disease. A study published in the latest issue of Psychophysiology finds that large rises in blood pressure during mental stress are associated with higher levels of activity in the regions of the brain associated with experiencing negative emotions and generating physiological responses in the rest of the body. The research suggests that exaggerated activity in the cingulate cortex during mental stress may generate excessive rises in blood pressure that may place some individuals at a greater risk for heart disease.

Most of what is known about the brain and its links to stress and heart disease has been taken from research on animals. This study on humans used functional magnetic resonance imaging (fMRI), a non-invasive technique for imaging brain activity. While they were inside an MRI scanner, twenty healthy men and women performed a computer task to create mental stress that, consequently, increased their blood pressure. This allowed the researchers to correlate simultaneous changes in blood pressure and brain activity during stress.

*Blackwell Publishing Ltd. "Mental Stress May Lead To Heart Disease." ScienceDaily, 11 Jan. 2006. Web. 21 Sep. 2013.*

### **Post-Reading Checkpoint:**

- 1) What variables of a person's mental, social, and physical health were involved in this study?
- 2) What is the relationship between these variables?
- 3) Besides raising blood pressure, what other effects do you think stress has on our body?



Mental, social, and physical health exist on a constantly shifting spectrum in our lives. A great variety of factors can influence them and a shift from positive to negative (or vice versa) in one can influence the others. When we experience changes in these components of our health, they can manifest in a wide array of effects.

In the following examples, work with a partner to label as many components of health you can find with **MH**, **SH**, or **PH** (for mental, social or physical health, respectively). You can label both causes and effects linked to each component of health.

**Scenario 1:** Lorenzo is a fifteen-year-old skateboarder. He has a few very close female friends, but has never had a girlfriend and hopes to develop a romantic relationship soon. He was very close to his grandfather, who recently died after a long battle with cancer. Lorenzo has earned average grades in school this year, but he gets stressed out easily. He talks to the school social worker every few weeks who gives him strategies for managing his stress. Lorenzo also frequently struggles to maintain focus in class. His mother took him for his annual physical a few weeks ago and mentioned this to his physician. He is scheduled to have a full evaluation for Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder in a few days. When Lorenzo was in junior high he experienced a big fluctuation with his weight. He had been overweight since he was 9 years old, but lost a significant amount of weight in his eighth grade year. He attributes his weight loss to a huge growth spurt and positive changes in his eating and exercise habits. Lately, a few of Lorenzo's skateboarding friends have been starting to smoke marijuana. He hasn't tried it before, but is starting to feel some peer pressure to give it a try.

Repeat the same process with Scenario 2 and 3 below, labeling as many components of health you can find with MH, SH, or PH.

**Scenario 2:** Ever since Tyler's older brother was locked up, he has been forced to step up in the family. He helps out at the family restaurant and takes care of his younger brothers and sisters after school. He is stressed out because all of his friends seem to get most of their work done at school, but he feels like he has hours of homework. He has played basketball his whole life, but doesn't know if he will have time to play on the school team this year because of these added pressures.

**Scenario 3:** In an effort to lose weight, Regina decided to join the school softball team, but she is starting to realize that she is still not getting enough physical activity in her daily life. She is stressed out because everyone else in her family is fit, but she struggles with her weight. Her siblings eat whatever they want and don't seem to put on any weight. Even when she watches what she eats, she can't seem to take off any weight. Lately, she has been spending more and more time in her bedroom and cutting herself off from family and friends. She wonders if she is suffering from depression.



Check your understanding with one more scenario. Label the components: MH, SH, or PH.

**Scenario 4:** Katy enjoys walking around her neighborhood because she feels like she knows everyone and everyone knows her. She especially enjoys attending parties. Since she has taken dance classes for several years, she feels very confident dancing and gets many compliments from her friends about her moves. But lately, the parties have been including alcohol and her best friend has been getting out of control after drinking. She is starting to worry about her friend and wonders if she should say something. But she doesn't want to be a hypocrite because she is thinking about experimenting with alcohol herself. Her friends just seem to be having so much fun with it.



Create a recipe for "YOU" using ingredients and directions that represent different parts of your life and who you are. Be sure to represent all 3 components of your health.