



DIMENSIONS: Well Body Advanced Techniques Program

The mission of the Behavioral Health & Wellness Program (BHWP) is to improve quality of life by facilitating evidence-based health behavior change for communities, organizations, and individuals. Our wellness philosophy emphasizes leading a meaningful and fulfilling life through conscious and self-directed behaviors, focused upon living at one's fullest potential.

Program Description

The DIMENSIONS: Well Body Advanced Techniques Program has been developed to match more recent scientific evidence that informs our knowledge about obesity and disease. This is in contrast to the standard view of obesity and disease held by the majority of the medical community today.

Standard Model



This model summarizes how many in the medical community conceptualize one of the most pressing medical challenges facing our country today – diseases related to obesity. The model also provides the fundamental guiding principles used by medical providers to treat and prevent chronic diseases when obesity is present. In brief, the model conceptualizes obesity as being caused by eating too much and exercising too little, and it advances the view that obesity leads directly to chronic diseases, such as cardiovascular disease and diabetes. If taking in too many calories and not exercising enough cause obesity, and obesity causes chronic disease, the treatment is straightforward:

- Take in fewer calories by eating less or exercising more;
- Lose weight;
- Reduce your chronic disease risk.

But is this what really occurs? Given the most current evidence, this model falls far short in explaining the associations between obesity and chronic disease.

Calories In, Calories Out. For decades, healthcare providers and government guidelines advised Americans to reduce calories and increase energy expenditure to decrease weight. Despite this nearly universal advice and efforts to follow it, obesity rates are not declining. In fact, the past few decades have seen ever greater numbers of people who are overweight or obese (as well as related chronic diseases). Almost three-quarters of Americans are either overweight or obese, and almost 40% are considered obese or extremely obese.

Obesity Causes Chronic Disease. The medical community also emphasizes that obesity leads directly to chronic diseases like heart disease and diabetes. While there is a well-established association between obesity and chronic disease, the nature of these associations is complex. Researchers are learning that the type and location of body fat is critical when looking at disease risk. Fat around the internal organs (“belly fat” or central adiposity) is much more predictive of chronic disease than fat elsewhere on the body. Moreover, individuals who are not



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overweight can still be at higher risk for chronic disease, if they have excess hidden, visceral fat around their abdominal organs. The standard treatment advice to eat less and exercise more makes no sense for people who are not overweight, but who are still at risk for chronic disease.

Reimagining A Well Body: An Alternative Perspective



Instead of conceptualizing obesity itself as the primary cause of chronic disease, researchers now suggest that obesity be viewed as a physical indicator or signal for other physiological disruptions that may increase a person's risk of developing chronic diseases. In particular, evidence points to a hormonal disruption called "metabolic syndrome," a combination of risk factors that increase a person's likelihood of developing chronic disease. Importantly, each risk factor of metabolic syndrome is associated with insulin resistance. Disrupted metabolic function and insulin resistance lead to both chronic disease and obesity (especially abdominal adiposity). This new model represents a better way of understanding associations between obesity and chronic disease. Therefore, the key to treatment and behavioral intervention lies not with reducing calories to lose weight, but rather with identifying ways to prevent and treat metabolic syndrome and insulin resistance.

Behavioral Factors that Influence Metabolic Health

Nutrition. Researchers are making strides to understand factors that lead to a higher risk of metabolic syndrome and its associated diseases while still recognizing the important role nutrition plays. But whereas the previous model led to nutrition advice focused on caloric and fat restriction, more recent advances in our understanding of metabolic syndrome call for a different set of recommendations. In the DIMENSIONS: Well Body Program training, we explain how nutritional choices and recent trends in the U.S. diet have led to a rise in metabolic syndrome and insulin resistance and associated disease. We also discuss nutritional strategies to reduce the effects of insulin and insulin resistance as well as to maintain metabolic health.

Physical Activity. Similarly, physical activity is important for health and well-being and for preventing diseases associated with metabolic disorder. But standard advice promotes physical activity as a means to lose weight, despite evidence that exercise programs do not help people to lose weight in the long term. Researchers are now discovering that the truly transformative benefits of physical activity aren't necessarily related to weight loss. Moreover, low energy levels are often yet another symptom of metabolic dysfunction, rather than simply a cause of obesity. In the DIMENSIONS: Well Body Program, we describe how physical activity positively impacts nearly every aspect of health and wellness.

Sleep. Researchers are learning more about how poor sleep quality and sleep deprivation affect metabolic function and chronic disease. Several body processes are regulated by sleep-wake cycles, including metabolism, immune function, and tissue growth and repair, which in turn impact numerous health outcomes. Sleep deprivation can



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cause increased blood pressure and increased risk for diabetes, obesity, and cardiovascular disease. It also leads to reduced cognitive function, including learning and memory, and can amplify negative emotional responses to stressors such as anger, anxiety, and impulsivity. Sleep deprivation has a number of metabolic consequences such as increased hunger (especially for high-carbohydrate foods) and decreased glucose tolerance, a precursor to type-2 diabetes. The DIMENSIONS: Well Body Program addresses the importance of sleep and discusses strategies to improve sleep quality.

Stress Management. While stress is a normal part of life, chronic stress has negative consequences as the body's systems become over-taxed and hormones, such as cortisol, remain high. Prolonged elevation of cortisol due to chronic stress can lead to a number of negative health conditions such as depression and mood changes, insulin-resistant diabetes, hypertension and cardiovascular disease, suppressed immune system, and central adiposity. In the DIMENSIONS: Well Body Program, we speak to the importance of reducing the harmful effects of stress and enhancing positive behaviors to support healthy stress management.

Motivational Interviewing for Behavior Change

Many chronic diseases can be prevented or better managed through changes in eating, physical activity, sleep, and stress management. However, making behavior changes can be difficult and simply having information about what to do does not necessarily lead to healthy change. The DIMENSIONS: Well Body Program incorporates Motivational Interviewing (MI) strategies to enhance motivation and support commitment to change. This includes a Motivational Intervention to help individuals set their agenda and goals for behavior change as well as identify personal motivations, challenges, strengths, and resources.

Priority Populations

The four behavioral factors discussed above impact the health of not only individuals, but families across generations. Poor health and chronic disease tend to run in families for several reasons, including factors such as genetic predispositions, engaging in similar behaviors that increase risk for developing chronic disease, and environmental factors such as availability of nutritious food and stress, which can change how genes are expressed.

Priority populations are especially likely to struggle with attaining healthy lifestyles. People living in poverty, those experiencing racial discrimination, and those struggling with mental health conditions or addictions are especially vulnerable when it comes to maintaining healthy nutrition, physical activity, sleep, and stress management. These challenges place priority populations at greater risk for developing chronic diseases and other health problems. We believe it is critically important to interrupt the intergenerational cycle of poor health and disease within the most vulnerable populations. This is a central aim of the DIMENSIONS: Well Body Program.

Program Structure

The DIMENSIONS: Well Body Program is intended to provide administrators, healthcare providers, and peer specialists the necessary knowledge and skills to promote physical health and well-being. This innovative program provides training on strategies for coping with stress, healthy sleep, healthy eating, and physical activity, as well as ways to promote positive behavior change through motivational engagement and behavior change strategies.



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Training Modules

Module 1: Coping with Stress. This module covers the concept of stress and its effects on the human body, discusses the consequences of chronic stress, and identifies strategies to support healthy stress.

Module 2: Healthy Sleep. This module discusses the components of healthy sleep, explores factors that contribute to healthy sleep, describes the impact of sleep on physical and emotional health, and identifies strategies to support healthy sleep.

Module 3: Healthy Eating. This module discusses the biology of eating, the role of insulin in chronic disease, trends in U.S. diet, factors that contribute to healthy eating, components of healthy eating, and strategies to support healthy eating.

Module 4: Physical Activity. This module describes the benefits of physical activity, components of healthy activity, different types of physical activity, and strategies to support healthy activity.

Module 5: Motivation for Health Behavior Change. This module explores ways to enhance behavior change by using the Motivational Interviewing (MI) approach and provides training on the effective use of strategies to enhance motivation and encourage commitment to change.

Module 6: Motivational Intervention. This module reviews the stages of change, the 5A's, and presents a Well Body Motivational Intervention. This includes discussion on how to help people assess their readiness to make health behavior changes and to set manageable goals.

Module 7: DIMENSIONS: Well Body Group. This module teaches the DIMENSIONS: Well Body Group curriculum as well as practice strategies for group facilitation. DIMENSIONS: Well Body Group sessions include:

Session A: The Whole Well Body – Helps participants define for themselves what it means to be healthy

Session B: The Mindful Well Body – Deepens awareness of participants' experiences of wellness in the moment

Session C: Well Body Essentials – Helps participants define their values, which guide priorities and focus for health behavior change

Session D: Well Body Wisdom – Participants set Well Body goals and identify strategies and resources to achieve these goals

Session E: The Well Body Journey – Teaches participants about the process of behavior change

Session F: Maintaining A Well Body – Helps participants explore ways to practice self-care and set their plan for physical wellness

For more information on our training programs, please contact:

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