

VETERINARY WELLBEING SUMMIT

Brought to you by AVMA, AAVMC and Zoetis



**100 Healthy Tips to Support
a Culture of Wellbeing**

100 HEALTHY TIPS TO SUPPORT A CULTURE OF WELLBEING

Creating cultures of wellbeing is a team effort in which everyone at every level within the practice or organization has a role to play. Taking cultural change seriously, making the workplace an environment that supports development in the nine dimensions of wellbeing, and helping employees address issues with which they struggle are the real building blocks to creating a workplace where everyone can thrive. Included in this handout are 100 healthy tips that you can apply at the individual and organizational level to support a culture of wellbeing.

THE NINE DIMENSIONS OF WELLBEING ARE:

- Creative
- Emotional
- Environmental
- Financial
- Intellectual
- Occupational
- Physical
- Social
- Spiritual

For more wellbeing resources visit
avma.org/wellbeing

CREATIVE WELLBEING

The creatively well person values and actively participates in a diverse range of arts and cultural experiences as a means to understand and appreciate the surrounding world.

Organizational:

- Hold an art show or establish a rotating exhibit of employee-created artwork.
- Form art-based affinity groups that can meet outside of work hours or during lunch, such as a jazz combo or knitting group.
- Organize an employee poetry reading during lunch or after-hours in a local coffeehouse.
- Designate an art corner with supplies to encourage creative thinking and expression.
- Put a keyboard or guitar in the break room.
- Promote events for local theaters, museums, symphony, and choir performances; encourage patronage of school musicals, concerts, and art shows.
- Set up a puzzle station at work, where folks can come in and puzzle—even if just for 5 minutes in between appointments.

Individual:

- Start with a brief writing exercise, “For me, creativity is...” Don’t allow yourself to say “I’m not creative.” Instead, expand your horizons and consider that creativity can be both a concrete action (writing a poem) and/or something intangible (like brainstorming a new way to approach a situation or task).
- Learn from others--study the people who do what you want to do very well, including people not in your field.
- Change mediums: if you typically paint, try poetry. If you like crossword puzzles, try Sudoku. If you typically color with pencils, try markers or crayons.
- Seek out inspiration: visit museums, attend live concerts, attend a book reading, take in a sunset.
- Make it a family or friends affair. Games such as Cranium provide a fun way to flex your creative and intellectual muscles.
- Make a commitment to take the class you’ve always wanted: ceramics, photography, singing, learning a new instrument, painting, creative writing—check out your library or other community resources for what may be available in your area.

EMOTIONAL WELLBEING

The emotionally well person can identify, express, and manage the entire range of feelings and seeks assistance to address areas of concern.

Organizational:

- Institute “Feelings” Rounds into your daily check-ins or weekly staff meetings. Encourage – but do not require – everyone to participate to the level they are comfortable. Provide a list of possible feelings to draw from to get people away from “good” and “fine”. (www.psychpage.com/learning/library/assess/feelings.html)
- Create an open and non-judgmental atmosphere for sharing feelings by modeling courageous vulnerability.
- Debrief as a group after particularly taxing cases or challenging interactions. Work together to identify what about the situation was distressing and how you can mitigate that distress in the future.
- Incorporate healthy animal interactions in your workplace – with therapeutic animals or allowing employees to bring pets to work. The human-animal bond is a powerful medium for the exchange of unconditional love.
- Allow for time off to see mental health professionals and make medical appointments.
- Provide positive reinforcement and encouragement when a team member prioritizes healthy boundary setting between home and work.

Individual:

- Speak to a neutral third-party individual, such as a therapist or life coach. An objective observer can illuminate your present circumstances in ways you are unable to see because you’re in them. You do not have to be presently distressed to benefit from talk therapy. Remember mental health is like physical health – some daily maintenance is key.
- Choose to be kind to yourself. If you engage in harsh inner dialogue, ask yourself if you’d speak to a beloved friend or family member the same way. Use that standard as a guide when you find yourself being less than kind and begin to challenge the negative self-talk. Is that highly critical voice saying things that are actually 100% true?
- Actively seek out laughter. Surround yourself with people who make you laugh. Try not to take yourself too seriously. Allow yourself to play. Read the funnies.
- Listen to your favorite comedians. Watch old episodes of beloved sitcoms. Be fearlessly silly. Make funny faces at your friends across the room. Tell “Dad” jokes. Celebrate puns.
- Make a list of people or things that restore energy in you and those that deplete your energy. Be discerning about what can stay and what must go—and then actually let them go.
- Notice when you get hung up on things that are outside your control. If you’re feeling helpless, focus on the one thing that can be done right now and nothing more.
- Learn to allow yourself to feel exactly what you are feeling – be it positive or negative. Take “should” out of your vocabulary and begin to remove judgement from the equation. How you are feeling is real and valid, and it is also temporary.

ENVIRONMENTAL WELLBEING

The environmentally well person recognizes the responsibility to preserve, protect, and improve the environment and appreciates the interconnectedness of nature and the individual.

Organizational:

- Create a work environment that is as clean, open, and light as possible.
- Incorporate live plants into the workplace – being cognizant of toxicities if animals are around.
- Utilize environmentally responsible practices in the workplace like limiting paper use, recycling, and composting.
- Reduce plastic waste and incentivize hydration by providing BPA-free reusable water bottles for all employees.
- Stock your clinic or office with items made from recycled materials (think toilet paper and paper towels) and clean with non-toxic chemicals.
- Provide an area for employees to eat lunch outdoors. Make meetings outside or go for walks as a team. Take fresh air breaks.

Individual:

- Learn about nature preserves in your area and make an effort to go exploring. Walking in a natural outdoor setting has been shown to be effective at reducing depression, stress, and anxiety.
- Make a personal commitment to recycle more, compost, or reduce consumption – whatever is feasible for you to do right now will give you a renewed sense of connectedness to the world you live in. Start with one thing so you don't get overwhelmed and give up, then gradually add on.
- Re-evaluate your commute. Consider riding a bicycle or taking public transportation. Maybe start with one day a week and see how your routine can change and adapt.
- Declutter your workspace and home by purging your belongings and donating what you can to a local thrift or consignment shop.
- Challenge yourself to purchase food from within a 50-mile radius.

FINANCIAL WELLBEING

The financially well person is fully aware of personal financial states and budgets, saves, and manages finances in order to achieve realistic goals.

Organizational:

- Offer employees a financial wellbeing program that educates them on topics such as debt reduction, asset management, and saving for current and future needs.
- Give employees the opportunity to put a portion of their paychecks into an emergency savings fund that is more easily accessible if the need arises.
- Offer financial assistance for continuing education credit and other professional development opportunities.
- Provide support for establishing and navigating retirement plans for your employees.
- Invest in your community by making an effort to utilize the services of local businesses for various needs within your office or clinic. It will improve the local economy (which will come back to benefit you) and strengthen the camaraderie amongst the municipal chamber of commerce to which you belong.

Individual:

- Create a budget and stick to it! If you aren't sure how to do that, there are various apps such as Mint or Wally that can assist you.
- To the extent that you are able, put some money away in a savings and/or retirement account.
- Consider hiring a financial planner to help you manage your finances. It may seem counter-productive to pay for a service when you're already concerned about money, but a professional will be able to navigate what you simply don't have the time or expertise to do, and that can be worth something.
- Be discerning with your spending. Try to only purchase things you absolutely need, and when you can, buy used or on consignment. You will save money, and reduce waste. A win-win!
- Use savings apps like Groupon or local coupon books to lighten the financial burden of certain purchases and activities. Bonus points if these coupons lead you to patronize local businesses!

INTELLECTUAL WELLBEING

The intellectually well person values lifelong learning and seeks to foster critical thinking, develop moral reasoning, expand worldviews, and engage in education for the pursuit of knowledge.

Organizational:

- Host “Lunch & Learn” talks for colleagues in topics both inside and outside the field. Encourage members of the community to contribute topics and even present their own, if willing.
- Institute a weekly journal club with your colleagues, where you rotate choosing a recent scientific article for everyone to read and come together to discuss.
- Foster a communal growth mindset in your workplace. This will include grace for learning and making mistakes, and modeling vulnerability in acknowledging your challenges and asking for help.
- Open your reception area or office space to local artists as a place to exhibit their work. It will increase your awareness of the art in your community and support local artists.
- Create “Fun Facts” flyers that rotate weekly or monthly and hang them on the back of bathroom stall doors or in the break room. Have a submission box available for team members to contribute their own.

Individual:

- Learn a new skill! Explore a hobby that you’ve never tried before.
- Pick up a new language or brush up on the Spanish or French you took in high school. Apps like Duolingo make it fun and easy to dabble in language-learning.
- Explore other cultures, either by traveling or by diving into local history and visiting nearby museums.
- Read. Fiction, non-fiction, journal articles – something that will catalyze both critical thinking and enjoyment.
- Listen. When you participate in active listening you are able to fully comprehend the information that is being given to you and you enhance your ability to learn effectively from others.
- Increase your self-awareness and intention around the opinions you hold. Do you have all the facts? Are you ignoring information or data that is valid and worthy of evaluation?

OCCUPATIONAL WELLBEING

The professionally well person engages in work to gain personal satisfaction and enrichment, consistent with values, goals, and lifestyle.

Organizational:

- Include allocations for continuing education for all the members of your practice in your organization's budget, and be supportive when time-off is requested for such opportunities.
- Determine the Myers-Briggs or DiSC classifications or Strengths Profiles for everyone on your team. This will create a better understanding of communication styles and help everyone take responsibility for working together in a positive, considerate way.
- Schedule and uphold regular performance reviews, both to bestow positive feedback on your team and to clarify job performance expectations for the future.
- Give team members the opportunity to provide feedback of their own in a respectful, perhaps anonymous, way. Train team members on the basics of providing effective feedback.
- As much as possible, allow members of the team to be involved in scheduling and organizing the workload. Many things are out of our control in veterinary medicine, and taking part in things that are within our control will reduce stress and improve wellbeing for all parties involved.
- Conduct a refresher course on safety in the workplace to reinforce best-practices and decrease the risk of work-related injury.

Individual:

- Be proactive about your own professional development. Seeking out continuing education opportunities that interest you will make you a more effective and valued member of the workforce.
- Take responsibility for your needs in the workplace and communicate clearly and effectively, and in the same turn, be considerate of others' needs and different communication styles.
- Be honest with yourself about your level of passion towards and investment in your work. Do you have a sense of purpose? Is your work meaningful and fulfilling? If it used to be and now it's not, investigate what has changed and possibly how your wellbeing (in all areas) might be affecting it and your interactions with others.
- Create a five or ten year vision for yourself professionally and personally. Is the work you are doing moving you towards that vision?
- Establish boundaries between work and home life. Turn off the notifications on your phone after a certain time every day.

PHYSICAL WELLBEING

The physically well person gets an adequate amount of sleep, eats a balanced and nutritious diet, engages in exercise for 150 minutes per week, attends regular medical check-ups, limits use of intoxicating substances, and practices safe and healthy sexual relations.

Organizational:

- Include stipends for gym memberships or other fitness activities in the benefits packages for your employees.
- Incentivize healthy habits by creating office-wide challenges around daily steps or water consumption.
- Offer alternatives to caffeinated beverages in your break room.
- Provide healthier snack options than standard vending machine fare.
- Schedule shift work in a way that employees can have adequate rest in-between shifts. When switching from working nights to days, allow for two full nights of sleep in-between.
- Be supportive of a team member that adjusts their schedule to make it possible to exercise or to schedule a medical appointment.

Individual:

- Batch-cook for the week so you have guaranteed balanced complete meals prepped for each day. It'll save you time throughout the week and it will eliminate the temptation to get take-out or hit the vending machine.
- Drink AT LEAST half your bodyweight in ounces of water every day (cups of coffee do not count towards this total). The goal is to urinate often and clear. If plain water is too boring for you, try dropping slices of fresh fruit in your (reusable) water bottle.
- Get moving! Find some way to move your body that is fun for you, and do it multiple times a week. There are so many options from walking to running to Zumba to barre class to lifting weights to yoga to cycling to martial arts to chopping wood--the possibilities are literally endless! It is up to YOU to find what works for YOU, and then DO IT.
- Assess your caffeine and alcohol consumption, and be honest and discerning about what's motivating you to consume those substances. There may be implications with your physical health, and your emotional, social, and occupational wellbeing can also be inextricably linked.
- Prioritize sleep! The average person thrives on 7-9 hours of sleep a night. Make this a necessity rather than a luxury. Good sleep hygiene could be its own pamphlet, look it up.

SOCIAL WELLBEING

The socially well person has a network of support based on interdependence, mutual trust, and respect and has developed a sensitivity and awareness towards the feelings of others.

Organizational:

- Plan social gatherings as a team outside of work hours. Try to refrain from organizing these gatherings around food and/or alcohol and instead, find ways to get to know your colleagues by doing activities together, such as playing board games. Bonus points for combining social interaction with physical activities.
- Create a screen-free zone in the break room so there is a place where people must put away their phones during lunch and interact with the world around them.
- Highlight an employee a week or month to give everyone the opportunity to share about themselves and get to know one another better.
- Make clear and effective communication a priority in your workplace by emphasizing the importance of learning and respecting each team member's individual communication style.
- When eating lunch with members of the team, refrain from talking "shop" and instead encourage everyone to share fun facts about themselves.

Individual:

- Limit time on social media. More than one hour a day is associated with a decrease in wellbeing.
- Schedule quality time face-to-face with family and friends. Make it as important as a work meeting or other professional obligations.
- Give experiential gifts, such as concert tickets or pottery classes, rather than material ones. This will benefit both the giver and receiver!
- Seek out non-work related activities that allow you to meet other people who are interested in something you're also interested in. This can benefit your social wellbeing because of the group aspect of the activity, and also many other aspects of wellbeing simultaneously!
- Introduce yourself to a neighbor or strike up a conversation with someone you meet on a walk or at the dog park. It may seem awkward and that's okay, it's real, honest human connection and there is no substitute for that!

SPIRITUAL WELLBEING

The spiritually well person seeks harmony and balance by openly exploring the depth of human purpose, meaning, and connection through dialogue and self-reflection.

Organizational:

- Hold ethics discussions that give people the opportunity to talk about difficult scenarios they've encountered and how they chose to deal with them.
- Encourage all members of the community to develop their own set of values. We don't all have to agree **and** we can be respectful and intentional about our choices and beliefs.
- Make grief and bereavement resources available to clients and staff after particularly difficult diagnoses or euthanasia.
- Share daily gratitudes as a group at the start or end of each work day, or both!
- Bring in someone to lead guided meditations during lunch breaks or staff meetings.

Individual:

- Cultivate a daily personal gratitude practice, either by journaling or talking about it with friends and loved ones.
- Try meditation. Even five minutes a day of mindful breathing can be beneficial. Seek out the assistance of apps like Headspace and Insight Timer for a plethora of guided meditations that do the thinking for you so you can simply relax.
- Contemplate your place in the universe. Although it may seem like a daunting topic, knowing and actively working towards your purpose in life can protect you from burnout and depression.
- Find a spiritual community that resonates with you. Participating in a community of individuals who can support and encourage you in your personal journey, regardless of context, is crucial to your overall wellbeing.
- Experiment with yoga, tai chi, qigong, or any other form of movement that connects the body with the breath. You will reap benefits in regards to stress and anxiety reduction, and also indirectly foster a deeper relationship with yourself.

For more wellbeing resources visit
avma.org/wellbeing