



WELLBEING – WHY IT MATTERS TO HEALTH A SUMMARY OF KEY POINTS

Levels of wellbeing vary across the lifecourse

*Starting Well*¹

- Children’s experiences in their first five years of life have lasting impacts on their wellbeing.
- Child wellbeing in the early years is strongly associated with the mental health of their parents.

Developing Well^{2, 3}

- Children’s ratings of their wellbeing appear to be most strongly influenced by relationships, with family members and with their peers.
- Wellbeing in adolescence suggests a ‘u-shaped’ curve, with wellbeing reaching its lowest ebb around 14-15. This decline appears to be sharper for girls
- Health is important for young people’s wellbeing, but they perceive it as less important for their wellbeing than adults do.

*Living Well*⁴

- Self-reported health is one of the factors most closely related to wellbeing.
- The frequency of contact with family and friends, and the quality of those personal relationships, are crucial determinants of people’s wellbeing.
- Caring responsibilities for someone with a disability or in poor health is associated with lower happiness ratings, and more depressive symptoms.

*Working Well*⁵

- Those in unemployment tend to experience lower levels of wellbeing than those in employment.
- It is not just having a job that is important, it is having a good job. Job quality and job security are important for greater wellbeing.
- There is evidence that unemployment of a parent may cause a child to have reduced levels of wellbeing in the longer term.

*Ageing Well*⁶

- Although advancing age is associated with physical and cognitive decline, wellbeing is consistently found to be higher in later life than among young or middle aged adults. However, wellbeing subsequently declines in the oldest old.

- Survival over an average of more than nine years was associated with greater enjoyment of life. Effects were large, with the risk of dying being around three times greater among individuals in the lowest (compared with the highest) third of enjoyment of life measures.

Social relationships are key to wellbeing^{3, 4, 6}

- Family relationships are very important for young people's wellbeing.
- Young people's experiences of bullying have a strong negative effect on their wellbeing.
- The influence of social relationships on the risk of death are comparable to other established mortality risk factors such as smoking and alcohol consumption, and actually exceed the influence of physical activity and obesity.
- Good quality relationships with partners have been found to be a strong correlate of happiness.

Wellbeing is part of the public health agenda^{7, 8, 9}

- Health is one of the top things people say matter to their wellbeing. There is a two way relationship between wellbeing and health: health influences wellbeing and wellbeing itself influences health.
- Subjective wellbeing influences health and longevity in healthy populations. It is estimated that high levels of subjective wellbeing can increase life by 4 to 10 years.
- Smoking is associated with lower levels of wellbeing, with some evidence demonstrating a causal link.
- An increase in the number of portions of fruit and vegetables consumed; a normal body weight; and meeting guidelines for physical activity are all associated with high levels of wellbeing.

Wellbeing of staff working in the health service can affect service delivery¹⁰

- There is a strong relationship between staff wellbeing and performance outcomes, with evidence demonstrating a causal link.
- How patients experience care can be just as important as the actual medical treatment they receive.
- Staff wellbeing is important in its own right (for example in relation to stress, bullying, and harassment) and it can improve the quality of both patient experience and their health outcomes.

The UK ranks mid-table internationally¹¹

- The UK ranks mid-table for many of the subjective and objective wellbeing indicators used in international surveys.
- The UK ranks above average for self-reported health among adults, but below average on the same indicator for children.

- Recently, the UK performed relatively poorly on a mental wellbeing index, ranking 20th of 27 EU countries.

Interventions can improve wellbeing¹²

- There are interventions designed to improve wellbeing and interventions designed to achieve other outcomes such as improved physical fitness, involvement in volunteering and neighbourhood social cohesion. While improved wellbeing was not a primary objective for these interventions, participation was linked with increased levels of wellbeing.
- Sometimes we may lack evidence that demonstrates that a particular intervention aimed at improving different aspect of people's lives (e.g., physical activity) also improves levels of wellbeing. However, if we know that that a particular behaviour leads to increased levels of wellbeing, we may hypothesise that improving this behaviour will also help to increase levels of wellbeing.

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¹ *Starting Well* (2013). A Compendium of Factsheets: Wellbeing Across the Lifecourse. Department of Health.

² *Developing Well – 6-11 Years* (2013). A Compendium of Factsheets: Wellbeing Across the Lifecourse. Department of Health.

³ *Developing Well – 11-19 Years* (2013). A Compendium of Factsheets: Wellbeing Across the Lifecourse. Department of Health.

⁴ *Living Well* (2013). A Compendium of Factsheets: Wellbeing Across the Lifecourse. Department of Health.

⁵ *Working Well* (2013). A Compendium of Factsheets: Wellbeing Across the Lifecourse. Department of Health.

⁶ *Ageing Well* (2013). A Compendium of Factsheets: Wellbeing Across the Lifecourse. Department of Health.

⁷ *The Relationship Between Wellbeing and Health* (2013). A Compendium of Factsheets: Wellbeing Across the Lifecourse. Department of Health.

⁸ *Wellbeing and Longevity* (2013). A Compendium of Factsheets: Wellbeing Across the Lifecourse. Department of Health.

⁹ *Health Behaviours and Wellbeing* (2013). A Compendium of Factsheets: Wellbeing Across the Lifecourse. Department of Health.

¹⁰ *Staff Wellbeing, Service Delivery and Health Outcomes* (2013). A Compendium of Factsheets: Wellbeing Across the Lifecourse. Department of Health.

¹¹ *International Comparisons of Health and Wellbeing: Where does the UK stand?* (2013). A Compendium of Factsheets: Wellbeing Across the Lifecourse. Department of Health.

¹² *What Works to Improve Wellbeing?* (2013). A Compendium of Factsheets: Wellbeing Across the Lifecourse. Department of Health.