A core value promoted by the American Holistic Nurses Association (2014) is that nurses engage in holistic self-assessment, self-care and personal development into their practice in order to enhance their understanding and relationships with others. This facilitates the nurse fulfilling a healer role.

The concept of nurse as healer is not new, although it seems that it had been lost for a period. The nursing profession developed as a healing art. Comforting, showing compassion, supporting, nurturing, and caring were core activities long associated with nursing. As the profession matured, nursing sought to enhance its credibility as a profession by incorporating more science, theoretical frameworks, and objective reasoning into practice. Nurses learned to perform comprehensive physical assessments, interpret data skillfully, write eloquent care plans, and use sophisticated technology. Unfortunately, in some circumstances, the increased use of the intellect overshadowed the use of the heart. Only recently have nurses moved to reclaim their healer role and re-emphasize the healing arts. Finally, science and art are integrated in the 21st Century nurse healer.

Characteristics of Nurse Healers

Considerable technical skill is required for many nursing interventions. Certainly, patients expect that the nurse can competently inject their intramuscular medications, regulate drip rates so that their bodies receive the appropriate intravenous solutions, suction their secretions without traumatizing them, and change a dressing without introducing bacteria. The knowledge and skill demanded for these procedures are not to be minimized. However, nurses have the potential to be more than competent technicians; they also must be effective healers to truly provide holistic, high quality services to patients.

Presence

As healers, nurses must be concerned with facilitating optimal health and harmony among the various aspects of the patient’s life: physical, mental, emotional, spiritual, social. Several characteristics enable nurses to provide this whole-person or holistic care, and one of them is presence. There are various ways in which nurses can be present with others; for example, nurses can be:

- physically with another but absorbed in their own thoughts. This can occur when a nurse hands a medication to a patient or hands a person a form without sensitivity to the person’s reactions, mood, and general physical state because the nurse is preoccupied with thoughts about his or her personal "to do" list.
- physically with another but focused on a task without consideration of the many facets of others. An example of this is the nurse who is preparing a patient for a procedure but doesn’t identify that the person is tense, frightened, and tearful.
- physically present in a manner that connects with others sufficiently to gain insight into their psychosocial and spiritual facets. This is the desirable type of presence in which the nurse clears his or her mind of other thoughts to focus on the patient, pick up on cues, ask questions, and seek an understanding of the total person and the complete needs that may be present.

Presence begins by nurses becoming centered prior to engaging with the client. Being centered means that total attention is focused on the client. The typical busy workplace with its many distractions, combined with the many “to-dos” that nurses have bouncing around their heads, support the need for nurses to take special steps to become centered before client interactions. Some ways of doing this include taking a few deep breaths and visualizing the tensions being released with each exhalation before entering the client’s room or home, saying an affirmation (e.g., I am now focused solely on Mrs. Smith) prior to the client interaction, or repeating a prayer or
verse that reinforces the importance of putting the client ahead of other activities. By quieting the body, mind, and emotions, and intentionally giving full attention to clients, nurses foster a therapeutic presence.

In the last level of connection, nurses go beyond impersonal completion of a task. Instead, they commit to a caring partnership and allow themselves to be a tool in the patient’s healing process.

When nurses are present, they create the time and space for patients to express, explore, and experience. For example, a home health nurse may be visiting a widowed man who is recovering from hip surgery. As the nurse goes about checking vital signs and the status of the wound, she asks the man how he is doing. The man responds, “Oh, I guess okay” in a manner that indicates he is not “okay.” A nurse who isn’t present may let that statement pass; however, this nurse is sensitive to the man’s feelings and, putting the demands of her schedule aside, chooses to invest a few minutes in exploring the issue. Taking a seat next to the patient the nurse places her hand on his arm, makes eye contact and says, “You sound as though there is something on your mind, Mr. Jones. What is it?” The man then begins to share his distress about the troubled life of his alcoholic son. Listening without judgment, the nurse encourages the man to express his concerns, validates his feelings, and offers to assist the man in finding counseling and resources to address the situation. The nurse could have accepted the man’s comment that he was “okay”, completed her assigned tasks, and left without ever having explored the issue, but instead, she demonstrated sincere interest in the patient’s total well-being, was sensitive to his covert feelings, and invested the extra time and effort to guide him in obtaining help. Equally important, she showed the man that he did not have to navigate stormy waters alone during this time of heightened vulnerability.

**Intention**

Most nurses want to help patients; however, a healer goes beyond the desire to help to connect with patients at a different level. This is done through intentionality, in which the nurse uses mindfulness and discipline to focus and engage with patients.

Intentionality is demonstrated before nurses have direct contact with patients through their personal preparation for the contact. This can be done in various ways. Some nurses make a conscious effort to take a few deep breaths as they shift their focus to the patients they are going to encounter. Others say affirmations or short prayers that express their intent to give patients their all. Still others visualize that they are receiving a healing light through the tops of their heads that will travel from their hearts to the hearts of their patients. Approaches can vary; the key point is that a deliberate action is taken to prepare for connection with the patient.

During contact with patients, intentionality is shown by attentive listening, encouraging the telling of stories, caring touch, and, at times, sharing silent periods. Distractions from televisions, coworkers, cell phones, and thoughts of the items on the to-do list need to be controlled as much as realistically possible. The nurse uses all facets of self to connect with all facets of the patient.

**Holism**

Nurse healers are models of holism; therefore, they must assume responsibility for their own states of wellness. They are proactive in engaging in positive health practices that promote optimal wellness and prevent illness. Their lives demonstrate balance, fulfilling relationships, positive self-concept, and equal appreciation for all facets of self—body, mind, and spirit. Illnesses and diseases are not just viewed as negative occurrences that need to be corrected, but also as self-learning opportunities that could serve purposes in the greater scheme of life.

Although nurses have been educated about positive health practices, many fail to follow these practices themselves. As basic as it may appear, it is beneficial for nurses, like everyone else, to periodically take stock of their health practices. As some positive health practices are reviewed, you may want to conduct a self-assessment and develop plans for improvement as needed.

**Nutrition**

Good nutrition is required to provide the body with energy, repair and regenerate tissues and cells, and maintain health. Despite the various (and sometimes conflicting!) popular diets promoted that each claim to be the perfect dietary plan, the wisest approach to nutrition is to consume a varied, balanced diet that provides adequate amounts of macronutrients and micronutrients. **Macronutrients** include:

- **Carbohydrates.** Carbohydrates provide the body with energy and facilitate the digestion of protein. There are two classes of carbohydrates: simple and complex. Simple carbohydrates consist of sugar whereas fruits, vegetables, breads, pasta, and cereals constitute complex carbohydrates. As compared to
preferable complex ones, simple carbohydrates offer fewer nutrients and higher levels of sugar that are quickly stored as fat.

- **Protein.** Protein is essential for many important functions in the body, such as tissue growth and repair, antibody formation, and fluid, electrolyte, and hormonal balance. Complete proteins, consisting of all of the essential amino acids, include meat, fish, fowl, eggs, and dairy. Beans, grains, peas, and other vegetable sources are considered incomplete proteins because they contain only some of the essential amino acids.

- **Fats.** The maintenance of healthy skin, regulation of cholesterol metabolism, provision of insulation, and transport of fat-soluble vitamins are aided by fats. Also of importance is the provision of the essential fatty acids (e.g., Omega-3 and Omega-6). Fatty acids are classified as saturated, unsaturated, and polyunsaturated. **Saturated fats,** the kind that must be kept to a minimum to prevent elevated levels of low-density lipoprotein (LDL), are found in meats, cream, whole milk, butter, cheese, vegetable shortening, and coconut and palm kernel oil. Olive and canola oils, sources of **monounsaturated fats,** and nuts, some fish, and other vegetable oil, sources of **polyunsaturated fats,** are good replacements for saturated fats. Fats contain 9 calories per ounce compared to 4 calories per ounce for carbohydrates and protein; therefore, their intake should be limited. The National Institutes of Health recommend that less than 30% of daily caloric intake be derived from fats, with less than one-third of that being from saturated fats.

- **Micronutrients** are the small elements found in food that play a large role in helping the body to function properly and consist of:

- **Vitamins.** Vitamins, each with its unique contribution, assist with a variety of bodily activities (Display 1). There are two types of vitamins. **Water-soluble vitamins,** named such because they dissolve in water and are excreted through the skin, include vitamin C, and the B-complex group. Vitamins A, D, K, and E are **fat-soluble vitamins;** these carry a high risk for toxicity because, unlike water-soluble vitamins, if taken in excess they can be stored in the liver and fat tissue.

- **Minerals.** Because the body is unable to synthesize them, minerals must be consumed on a regular basis (Display 2). Minerals are classified into macrominerals and microminerals (trace minerals). Calcium, phosphorus, sodium, and potassium are the **macrominerals.** Iron, iodine, manganese, chromium, selenium, copper, fluoride, molybdenum, boron, and zinc are the **microminerals;** although needed only in minute amounts, the deficiency of these minerals can cause serious health problems.

**Habits**

Knowing the basics of good nutrition strengthens the ability to properly fulfill nutritional needs, but knowledge hardly guarantees that a healthy diet will be consumed. Nurses share similar challenges to other individuals in consuming a nutritious diet, maintaining weight within an ideal range, and avoiding excesses of caffeine, sugar, and fats. The busy schedules of many nurses may preclude time for nutritious meals, leading them to grab a donut for breakfast en route to work, gulp chips and soda to ease the hunger pangs from a skipped lunch, and get a boost for the ride home from a giant cappuccino. Scarc time, lack of planning, and stress are among the factors that can lead nurses down the path of poor nutrition.

Good eating habits foster positive nutritional states. Breakfast shouldn’t be skipped; it needn’t be a large meal, just a smart one. Rather than coffee and donut, a better choice would be fresh fruit, grain cereal with skim milk or yogurt, and juice. Several nutritious small meals throughout the day can be beneficial in supplying nutritional needs, maintaining a stable blood glucose levels, and reducing episodes of snacking. A daily multivitamin supplement is beneficial for most people. Few people consume the ideal diet that would negate the need for this supplement or have the benefit of eating freshly picked fruits and vegetables (the longer the period between when these items were picked and when they reach your table, the greater the loss of nutrients). Further, the processing and cooking of food cause some vitamins and minerals to be lost.

In addition to the **what of eating,** it is useful to consider the **how of eating.** Is food gulped without giving taste buds a chance to detect the flavors? Is dinner mindlessly shoved in the mouth while watching television? Are meals consumed behind the wheel of a car? Enjoying the dining **experience** not only promotes good nutrition but also fosters a good quality of life. This doesn’t mean that each meal must be elaborate using fine china and silver, but that time is taken to relax and enjoy what is being consumed. An interesting exercise could be to experiment for a day in making a conscious effort to identify all the sensations of all the food you eat: the crunching sound as you bite into an apple, the aroma of coffee, the smooth surface of a tomato, the ridges of a raisin as you roll in on your tongue, the different flavors and colors of the food you encounter in one meal. This mindfulness to eating could feed more than the body!
Obesity
More than one-third of Americans are obese (National Center for Chronic Disease Control and Prevention, 2014). Although genetic factors, some medications (e.g., steroids, tricyclic antidepressants, antihypertensives), and a few diseases can be responsible for some obesity, most people gain weight because their caloric input exceeds their caloric expenditure. A sedentary lifestyle and high-fat, high-carbohydrate diet are significant risk factors for obesity. If obesity is a problem, it is beneficial to consider beliefs about food, cultural influences, family dynamics, relationships, and emotional needs as these influence overeating.

Fluids
Good fluid intake is essential to health. The body loses 64-80 ounces of fluids daily through breathing, perspiration, voiding, and elimination; nurses with active schedules have a greater fluid loss, as do those who live in dry climates. Sufficient fluids must be consumed to replace those lost, which equates to six to eight 8-ounce glasses of fluid daily. Plain water is an ideal means of fluid replacement, as the diuretic effect of caffeine-based fluids reduces some of the benefits. Decaffeinated green tea, hot or cold, is a beneficial source of fluid that offers other health benefits, also.

Fasting
The chemicals that are consumed in the average American diet cause toxins to accumulate in the body that can lead to a variety of ill effects. One method to eliminate these toxins is by fasting. Fasting has been used since the earliest of times to cleanse the body and sharpen the spirit. There are various types of fasts that can be done, ranging from the ingestion of nothing but water, to consuming only juices and fruits. A fast can last anywhere from one day to several weeks. If people are healthy and there are no medical problems that would be affected by fasting, they should experience no difficulty with a two-day fast consisting of only water intake or a five-day fast in which only water and juices are ingested. Prolonged fasts or fasts in the presence of health conditions need to be conducted under the supervision of a health professional. Fasting usually is not advised for persons with diabetes, hypoglycemia, eating disorders, malnutrition, cancer, infectious diseases, renal or liver disease, ulcerative colitis, or bronchial asthma; women who are pregnant should not fast. Fasting stimulates a cleansing and removal of toxins from the body which can cause some physical effects, including:

- coated tongue
- unpleasant taste
- halitosis
- increased body odor
- skin dryness
- headache
- fatigue
- dizziness
- insomnia
- nausea
- aching joints
- flu-like symptoms
- reduced pulse and blood pressure.

In some persons, an irregular heartbeat can occur. A several pound weight loss is common.
Activities do not need to be drastically modified for short-term fasts, although it is best to avoid strenuous exercise. It can help to schedule extra rest periods on the fast days and to assure a good fluid intake. Good personal hygiene is important while fasting. As toxins are eliminated through the skin, frequent bathing is useful, including gently scrubbing the skin with a soft brush. Frequent oral hygiene is needed, as well. (Rinsing the mouth with lemon juice can reduce tongue coating and unpleasant tastes. It is important to follow this with a rinse with water to protect tooth enamel from the acidic effects of the lemon juice.)

There is some belief that the elimination of toxins and other beneficial effects of fasting can be accomplished in a gentler way with a cleansing diet such as:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Breakfast</th>
<th>Low-sugar fruit eaten whole</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>One hour before lunch</td>
<td>Water</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lunch</td>
<td>Steamed vegetables and a grain product</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>One hour before supper</td>
<td>Fresh vegetable juice</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
This low-fat, high-fiber vegetarian diet provides a continuous cleansing effect without the stress of a fast.

**Self-assessment**

As simplistic as it may sound, nurses would be wise to regularly take stock of their own health state to identify deficiencies. As this relates to nutrition, some helpful self-assessment questions could include:

- Does your weight fall within the ideal range for your height and age?
- Are your cholesterol levels within normal limits?
- How much fluid do you consume each day?
- What is your pattern of food consumption?
- Do you enjoy food?
- Are you relaxed while eating?
- Is mealtime a pleasant experience?
- How many snacks do you have throughout the day?
- How often do you substitute “junk” or “fast” foods for nutritious ones?
- Do you have problems with hypertension, hyper- or hypoglycemia?
- How much caffeine do you consume during an average day?
- Do you eat when stressed, tired, upset?
- Do you have frequent colds, infections or other signs of altered immune function?
- Do you generally have high levels of energy and alertness?
- Are there aspects of your family experiences or ethnic background that contribute to poor eating habits for you?

Some problem areas may surface in the answers to these questions? For instance, a person may know that she snacks but until thinking about how many she eats during the course of an average day, she may not realize that she is consuming 1500 calories in candies, cookies, and chips. Likewise, she may detect that on the days when she orders in a cheese steak sub and fries for lunch, she has low energy for the remainder of the day.

**Exercise**

Most nurses have jobs that keep them moving most of their shifts so they often think that obtaining sufficient exercise is one problem they don’t have. However, a person can be physically active to the point of exhaustion but not truly exercising.

**Types**

Exercise is the conscious act of moving in order to maintain strength and/or function. There are different types of exercises, including:

- **Flexibility**: gentle stretching, such as tai chi or yoga, that is useful to do daily
- **Strengthening**: exercises that should be done every other day to develop and improve muscle tone, such as weight training, playing tennis, and performing physical labor
- **Aerobic**: exercises that involve activities such as brisk walking, bicycling, jumping rope, and swimming that are helpful to do at least several times during the week

**Developing a plan**

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (2014) recommends the following physical activity for adults:

- 2 hours and 30 minutes (150 minutes) of moderate-intensity aerobic activity (i.e., brisk walking) every week and muscle-strengthening activities on 2 or more days a week that work all major muscle groups (legs, hips, back, abdomen, chest, shoulders, and arms), or
- 1 hour and 15 minutes (75 minutes) of vigorous-intensity aerobic activity (i.e., jogging or running) every week and strengthening activities on 2 or more days a week that work all major muscle groups (legs, hips, back, abdomen, chest, shoulders, and arms), or
- An equivalent mix of moderate- and vigorous-intensity aerobic activity and muscle-strengthening activities on 2 or more days a week that work all major muscle groups (legs, hips, back, abdomen, chest, shoulders, and arms).

It is useful to honestly assess the amount of exercise engaged in during a typical day to determine how closely it matches with the above recommendations. If it isn’t being done, some regular form of exercise (e.g., walking,
playing ball, an aerobics class) needs to be scheduled at least several times during the week—or, ideally, daily. People unaccustomed to exercising should start with a 10 minutes session and then progress to 20 minutes as tolerance and condition improve. In addition, opportunities to increase your exercise during your routine day should be taken advantage of; these could include:

- walking stairs instead of taking elevators
- parking in the farthest spot from the building
- using part of lunch time to take a short walk
- taking a few minutes each hour to stretch and bend

When doing exercises for cardiopulmonary endurance—such as jogging, walking, cycling, swimming, and other forms of aerobic exercises—it is beneficial to determine the heart rate during exercise to assure that the rate stays within a safe range. To do this, subtract your age from the figure 220 to obtain your maximum heart rate and then multiply that answer by 70% (0.7) to obtain the target heart rate. The heart rate should stay in a range of 10 beats of the target heart rate during exercise. For example, if you are 45 years of age, your heart rate should fall within 112 and 133 beats per minute based on the following calculation:

\[
\begin{align*}
220 - 45 &= 175 \\
175 \times 0.7 &= 122.5
\end{align*}
\]

Target heart rate

If the heart rate during exercise is more than 10 beats above the target heart rate the exercise should be reduced the next time it is done. If the heart rate is more than 10 beats lower than the target heart rate, the intensity of your exercise should be increased the next time to assure optimal cardiopulmonary benefit is being obtained. (Heart rate monitors can be used as alternatives to manually taking the pulse.) An attempt should be made to gradually increase the intensity of exercises. Usually, people are on safe ground as long as they are able to carry on a conversation while exercising without experiencing symptoms of overexertion (e.g., chest pain, severe shortness of breath, dizziness, nausea).

It is important that an exercise plan be developed that can be sustained long-term. This must be taken into account when giving consideration to joining a gym, committing to a class, or laying out a large sum of money for equipment.

**Rest**

Periods of rest and sleep are essential to refresh and renew the body, mind, and spirit. They help in maintaining balance and a sense of well-being.

Sleep is controlled by two specialized areas of the brain:

- **Reticular activating system (RAS)** which is associated with wakefulness
- **Bulbar synchronizing region (BSR)** which is most active during sleep

These two systems are thought to intermittently activate and then suppress the brain centers causing periods of wakefulness and sleep. There are two kinds of sleep: **rapid eye movement (REM)** and **non-rapid eye movement or slow wave (NREM) sleep**. A normal sleep cycle consists of four stages of NREM and a final stage of REM sleep.

Rest is a period of inactivity and peace. A period of inactivity doesn’t necessarily mean that one is resting. (If you’ve ever laid in bed in the middle of the night worrying about something you needed to do the following day you understand this!) Peace of mind promotes rest and sleep.

**Building positive habits**

A useful way to assess this area is to consider if you awaken refreshed and ready to face the day or with the feeling that you could use several more hours of sleep? If you find that you lack energy and enthusiasm, self-assess for factors that could be interfering with your sleep and rest, such as those listed in Display 3. Some practical ways that sleep and rest can be promoted include:

- establishing a regular bedtime
- meditating
- getting some exercise in the late afternoon and early evening
- limiting caffeine and alcohol intake
spending some time outdoors during the day
- drinking an herbal tea that does not contain caffeine (e.g., chamomile, valerian)
- adjusting the environment (e.g., controlling noise, reducing lighting)
- taking a warm bath about one hour before bedtime
- getting a massage

Stress Management
Stress is a fact of life for most nurses. Sources of stress differ for each individual. For example, a nurse who works in a long-term care facility may experience considerable stress if faced with working in an emergency department whereas the emergency department nurse could be equally stressed having to manage chronic health issues in a nursing home setting. In addition, the life that nurses live beyond the formal work setting produces its share of stress, also. The challenge is the way in which one reacts to and copes with the stress that is most important. Poor stress management can negatively affect one’s mental, physical, emotional, or spiritual well-being.

General Adaptation Syndrome
Decades ago, Hans Selye (1984), the father of stress research, described the body’s response to stress as the General Adaptation Syndrome consisting of three stages:

- **Alarm reaction:** commonly known as the fight-or-flight response, this stage is characterized by the person preparing to confront the stress, physically and mentally. There is a rush of adrenalin that causes the heart to pound, the mouth to get dry, and blood to rush from the extremities.
- **Stage of resistance:** some of the intensity of the alarm reaction is reduced although the body stays prepared to react.
- **Stage of exhaustion:** if the threat and heightened sense of readiness persist, the body reaches a point in which it can no longer sustain the extra energy requirement and begins to experience negative effects. It is in this stage that illness can result.

Some stress has pleasant or positive effects, such as winning a lottery or being given a surprise party. This good stress was termed *eustress* by Selye; although there is an alarm reaction, it is of short duration. However, bad stress, or *distress* as Selye labeled it, is a more serious matter and can arise from situations like being fired from a job or learning that a loved one is terminally ill. Distress initiates the fight or flight response and can have negative effects on health and well-being.

Healthy habits
The effects of stress can manifest in many ways, such as elevated pulse and blood pressure, chest pain, headaches, indigestion, diarrhea, insomnia, fatigue, disinterest in sex, accident proneness, depression, anxiety, irritability, complaining, forgetfulness, increased errors, and poor work habits.

It is important to review changes and symptoms that could be associated with stress. These can develop so subtly and become so chronic that their relationship to stress could be masked. Rather than have quality of life reduced or treat the problem symptomatically (e.g., with drugs, alcohol, job-hopping), it is effective to develop strategies to manage the stress that is encountered.

Getting proper rest and eating a nutritious diet can boost the ability to manage stress, as can doing deep breathing exercises, slowly counting to ten, diverting attention, scheduling time realistically, meditating, and saying a short prayer. Carving out time alone is a wonderful way to keep stress from overwhelming life. Solitary time can help to clear the mind, gain insight into life and relationships, and tap into the strength of a higher power. Solitude can be sought in several ways:

- **Schedule a day of complete solitude once each month.** Go away if you can; if that is not possible, stay home and leave the kids with a friend, unplug the phone, refrain from checking email or regular mail. (Before claiming that you just couldn’t find a day each month to be alone, just consider the time you spend in unessential activities, such as window shopping and watching television, and try to shift your priorities.)
- **Build at least one-half hour of personal quiet time into each day.** The morning, before the rest of the family rises or before going to work, can be a good time and has the added advantage of getting you centered to face the day.
- **Decompress and take 15 minutes alone between the time you come home from work and the time you start home chores.**
• Designate a room or chair that the rest of your family can identify as your “quiet time place.” When you occupy this space it signifies that this is your time alone and that you shouldn’t be interrupted.
• Reduce routine distractions. Turn off the car radio and use driving time for reflection. Avoid having television and radios playing as background noise.

**Humor**

*A cheerful heart is good medicine, but a crushed spirit dries up the bones* (Proverbs 17:22). This ancient wisdom continues to hold true today. Humor and optimism have a positive impact on health. The act of laughing produces physiological effects that can be beneficial; these effects include:

- Increased heart rate and circulation
- Increased respirations and oxygenation of tissues
- Exercise of thoracic and abdominal muscles
- Release of endorphins which is helpful in improving mood, reducing pain sensations, decreasing anxiety, and relieving muscle tension
- Increased metabolism
- Stimulation of the immune system

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It is a positive health practice to find ways for laughter to permeate your life and the lives you touch. Share jokes and funny stories. If you’re not skilled at remembering or delivering jokes, try keeping a scrapbook of clippings of funny stories and jokes that you can tap when needed. Include an abundance of comedies among your movie selections and view old sitcoms. Read humorous books. Spend time with children. Be playful and smile often.

Very importantly, don’t take yourself too seriously. Be willing to laugh at yourself, particularly when you make stupid mistakes. You have a choice as to the manner in which you react to the unpleasant incidents in your life. You can become angry and complain, or find the humor in the situation and take it lightly. Finding the humor in the situation gives you a sense of control. Further, it influences the mood of those around you and can aid in reducing the stress of yourself and others.

**Relationships**

Human beings are wired to be in relationship with each other. The wisdom and depth gained through meaningful relationships equip nurses to make meaningful connections with patients. It is the difference between looking at a flat piece of glass versus the many facets of a glistening diamond.

As important as relationships are to equipping nurses to engage in meaningful ways with patients, personal relationships can prove to be challenging. Like many people in helping professions, nurses may be too physically, emotionally, and spiritually drained from their work to develop and maintain personal relationships. Job stresses may be displaced at home, disrupting relationships with significant others.

**Building healthy habits**

Taking stock of the status of relationships can be beneficial in revealing relationship deficiencies and getting them mended before irreparable damage occurs. Some questions to reflect on include:

- Who are your three most significant friends and how long has it been since you’ve spent time with them?
- When was the last time that you spent quality time with your spouse/significant other? Parents? Children? Grandchildren? Siblings?
- Do you have ample time and energy to telephone, email, or visit significant others on a regular basis?

Maintenance of relationships requires conscious efforts to plan time and experiences with the important people in your life. To prevent hectic schedules from causing weeks or even months to slip by without contact with friends and family, you may find it helpful to allocate specific times on your calendar for “relationship maintenance.” This could consist of one weekday evening that is used for making telephone contact or a block of weekend time that is left open for social visits. Visualizing significant others, praying for them, and keeping photographs of them in highly visible areas also can serve as reminders and means of connection.

**Getting in touch with self**
Connecting with self is a crucial part of a nurse’s self-care. A nurse’s effectiveness as a healer is enhanced by gaining insight into self, nurturing self, and celebrating self. There are several different strategies that can be used in this journey.

**Meditation**

Meditation is a practice that quiets and relaxes the body, mind, and spirit. There are a variety of forms of meditation, including:

- Transcendental meditation, a practice introduced by Maharishi Mahesh Yogi that leads the body into profound relaxation while making the mind more alert
- Concentrative meditation in which attention is focused on a sound, image or breathing
- Mindfulness meditation in which attention is paid to the body’s sensations

Rather than be concerned with the “right” procedure for a specific type of meditation, the focus should be on achieving the outcomes using a process that “feels right” to you. Tailoring these basic steps could prove useful in developing an individualized mediation experience:

- Find a quiet place where you will not be interrupted
- Sit in a comfortable position with your extremities supported and relaxed
- Close your eyes
- Take a few deep breaths; concentrate on your inspirations and exhalations
- Beginning at your facial muscles and working to the toes, think about relaxing each muscle group sequentially with each deep breath
- As your body reaches a relaxed state, continue to breathe deeply as you mentally repeat a calming word or phrase (e.g., “Peace,” “God is love,” “Goodness”)
- If your mind strays, just take a few deep breaths and return your focus to relaxation
- After about 10 minutes, as you feel ready, slowly begin to move your body and open your eyes

Practiced on a regular basis, meditation can be effective in reducing stress, boosting immune function, and promoting clarity of thinking. Meditation also has similar benefits for older adults and would be a wonderful practice to teach them.

**Journaling**

Journaling can be an effective means of inner growth and personal discovery, and fortunately, no special writing skills are needed. A journal is a personal record of events, thoughts, and dreams that takes a unique form for each individual. It can serve to keep track of one’s history, but at its deepest level, it assists in understanding one’s life journey. A reflection on journal entries can enable you to be more aware of life’s special moments. Expressing conflicts and thoughts in writing can assist in working through issues and making decisions.

Office supply and stationary stores usually have attractive books that can be used for journaling, although a plain notebook will do just fine. Increasing numbers of people are journaling on their computers. The format is less important than the act.

Some people are able to sit down and immediately begin free-flow writing in which the words are scribed without judgment or editing. Others, particularly those for whom journaling is a new experience, may have no clue where to begin. Writing about specific activities can serve as a springboard to more creative writing; the types of areas that can be written about are listed in

**Story sharing**

Typically, there have been sufficient challenges, surprises, encounters, and twists and turns in most people’s lives to provide ample material for a Broadway play. Telling your life story can provide insight into yourself and put experiences into perspective. It also can offer guidance and hope to the listener.

Life stories can be written or recorded on a video or audiotape. There are a variety of approaches that could be used to record your life story, including a review of the highlights of each decade of life and a discussion of major life events. Sharing life stories with others furthers helps to explore the meanings of experiences.

**Other measures**

There are other measures that can assist in self-discovery. These include retreats, prayer, and counseling. As connection with self is an essential component of ongoing self-care, activities that can be supported and sustained are the best to utilize.
Committing to Self-Care

Intellectually, most nurses appreciate that self-care is essential to placing the body, mind, and spirit in the best position to engage in a therapeutic relationship with others. However, many nurses fail to properly care for themselves. The reasons for this are many and include:

- putting the needs of everyone else ahead of one’s own
- failing to plan time for self
- poor limit-setting
- valuing doing over being
- guilt
- inability to set priorities
- denial of personal needs
- unhealthy mental scripts (I don’t deserve to do this for myself, I’m not worth it, the needs of others are more important than mine, I’ll manage)

It is important to determine if there are factors such as these in your life that prevent you from taking care of yourself and to take action to change them. The degree to which you give to yourself will influence the degree to which you are able to give to others.

References


Bibliography


**Web Resources for Additional Information**

Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics  
www.eatright.org

American Meditation Institute  
www.americanmeditation.org

Center for Mind-Body Medicine  
www.cmbm.org

Food and Nutrition Information Center  
fnic.nal.usda.gov

National Institutes of Health  
Office of Dietary Supplements  
www.ods.od.nih.gov

National Women’s Health Resource Center/ Healthy Women  
www.healthywomen.org

Office of Women’s Health  
www.womenshealth.gov

**Display 1 - Common Vitamins, Their Functions, and Sources**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Vitamin</th>
<th>Function</th>
<th>Source</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Vitamin A (Retinol)</td>
<td>Antioxidant. Promotes nonspecific resistance to infection, aids in production of lysozymes in tears, saliva and sweat that help fight bacteria, stimulates cell-mediated and humoral immunity, promotes good vision and healthy tissue and hair. Beta-carotene metabolizes into vitamin A in the body and is a stronger antioxidant than vitamin A; at least 15mg of beta-carotene daily is recommended.</td>
<td>Milk, butter, liver, green and yellow vegetables</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vitamin D</td>
<td>Promotes strong bones and teeth, calcium-phosphorus metabolism</td>
<td>Sunlight, egg yolk, organ meats, fish</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vitamin E</td>
<td>Antioxidant properties that aid in the prevention of free-radicals, enhances antibody production, maintains circulatory system; stronger immune-boosting effect when taken with selenium</td>
<td>Dark green vegetables, eggs, liver, wheat germ, vegetable oil, oatmeal, peanuts, tomatoes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vitamin F (Unsaturated fatty acids)</td>
<td>Promotes healthy skin, blood coagulation, cholesterol, glandular activity</td>
<td>Sunflower seeds, vegetable oils</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vitamin K (Menadione)</td>
<td>Blood clotting</td>
<td>Green leafy vegetables, yogurt, molasses</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## Water Soluble Vitamins

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Vitamin</th>
<th>Function</th>
<th>Source</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Vitamin B1 (Thiamin)</td>
<td>Promotes resistance to infection, primary immunoglobulin response, digestion, cardiovascular function, energy production</td>
<td>Peas, lima beans, asparagus, corn, potatoes, blackstrap molasses, brown rice, meat, nuts, poultry, wheat germ</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vitamin B2 (Riboflavin)</td>
<td>Along with other B-complex vitamins, helps to maintain mucosal barriers that protect against infection, aids in production of antibodies and red blood cells, skin repair</td>
<td>Brewer’s yeast, broccoli, spinach, asparagus, Brussels sprouts, peas, corn, blackstrap molasses, nuts, organ meats, whole grains</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vitamin B6 (Pyridoxine)</td>
<td>Promotes health of mucous membranes and blood vessels, involved in antibody formation, red blood cells, affects immune function more than other B-vitamins</td>
<td>Bananas, avocados, carrots, kale, spinach, sweet potatoes, apples, wheat germ, grains</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vitamin B12 (Cobalamin)</td>
<td>Development of red blood cells, maintenance of nervous system, believed to exert regulatory influence on T-helper and suppressor cells</td>
<td>Cheese, fish, milk, milk products, organ meats, eggs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Niacin (Niacinamide B3)</td>
<td>Convert food to energy, healthy skin, nervous system, cell metabolism</td>
<td>Cereals, yeast, lean meat, liver, eggs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Biotin (Vitamin H)</td>
<td>Metabolism of protein, carbohydrates, and fats, healthy skin and circulatory system</td>
<td>Egg yolk, green leafy vegetables, milk, organ meats</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vitamin C (Ascorbic acid)</td>
<td>Antioxidant, wound healing, healthy gums, believed to promote phagocytic function, believed to aid in preventing common cold and influenza</td>
<td>Citrus fruits, berries, green peppers, broccoli, Brussels sprouts, spinach</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Folic acid (Folacin, Folate, Vitamin B9)</td>
<td>Production of red blood cells, enhance immune system, normal growth</td>
<td>Green leafy vegetables, milk and other dairy products, organ meats, oysters, salmon, Brewer’s yeast, dates, tuna, whole grains</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pantothenic acid</td>
<td>Enhances immune system, promotes antibody formation, helps convert proteins, carbohydrates, and fats into energy</td>
<td>Brewer’s yeast, legumes, organ meats, salmon, wheat germ, whole grains, mushrooms</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Choline (Lecithin)</td>
<td>Regulates liver and gallbladder, cell membrane structure, nerve transmission</td>
<td>Yeast, eggs, fish, lecithin, wheat germ, organ meats, soy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inositol</td>
<td>Metabolism of fat and cholesterol, nerve function</td>
<td>Molasses, yeast, lecithin, fruits, meat, milk, nuts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Para-aminobenzoic acid (PABA)</td>
<td>Pigmentation of skin, maintenance of hair color, health of blood vessel wall</td>
<td>Molasses, eggs, liver, milk, rice, yeast, wheat germ, bran</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vitamin P (Bioflavoids)</td>
<td>Maintenance of blood vessel wall</td>
<td>Skin and pulp of fruits</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**Display 2 - Minerals, Their Functions and Sources**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Minerals</th>
<th>Function</th>
<th>Source</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Calcium</td>
<td>Growth and maintenance of teeth and bones, muscle contractions, nerve transmission</td>
<td>Milk, cheese, green vegetables</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chromium</td>
<td>Carbohydrate metabolism, energy production, glucose utilization</td>
<td>Yeast, whole grains, vegetable oils</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Copper</td>
<td>Hemoglobin production, enzyme activity, protection from infection</td>
<td>Nuts, seeds, organ meats, raisins, molasses, seafood</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Iodine</td>
<td>Production of thyroid hormone, regulation of metabolism</td>
<td>Seafood, kelp, iodized salt</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Iron</td>
<td>Transport oxygen to tissues, enzyme activity, immune function</td>
<td>Spinach, lima beans, peas, Brussels sprouts, broccoli, strawberries, asparagus, blackstrap molasses, eggs, fish poultry, wheat germ, shredded wheat</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Magnesium</td>
<td>Enzyme activity, regulation of acid-base balance, glucose metabolism, nerve function, protein production</td>
<td>Honey, bran, green vegetables, nuts, seafood, spinach, kelp</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manganese</td>
<td>Enzyme activity in reproduction, growth, fat metabolism</td>
<td>Whole grains, eggs, nuts, green vegetables</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phosphorus</td>
<td>Formation of bones and teeth, muscle contraction, kidney function, nerve and muscle activity</td>
<td>Eggs, fish, meat, poultry, grains, cheese</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Potassium</td>
<td>Fluid-electrolyte balance, pH balance of blood, nerve and muscle function</td>
<td>Dates, raisins, figs, peaches, sunflower seeds</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Selenium</td>
<td>Antioxidant (with vitamin E), protects cell membrane, promotes humoral immunity, potentiates activity of phagocytes</td>
<td>Butter, wheat germ, whole grains, seafood, eggs, brown rice, apple cider, vinegar, garlic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zinc</td>
<td>Stimulates T cell immunity (but decreases phagocytic immunity), wound healing, development and growth of reproductive organs, production of male hormone</td>
<td>Brewer’s yeast, liver, seafood, soybeans, spinach, sunflower seeds, mushrooms</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Display 3 - Factors That Potentially Could Interfere with Sleep and Rest**
- high fat, high sugar diet
- insufficient daytime activities
- too many or too lengthy daytime naps
- too much caffeine
- too much alcohol intake
- poorly managed pain
- breathing or circulatory conditions
- urinary tract disorders
- depression
- anxiety
- medications
- dissatisfaction or troubles with your job or relationships
- feeling disconnected from God, spiritually depleted
Display 4 - Possible Topics for Journaling

- Events in the news and your reactions to them
- Daily activities
- Interactions, conversations
- Prayers and their answers
- Occurrences that triggered memories
- Dreams
- Joys
- Frustrations
- Successes
- Failures
- Things to be thankful for
- Observations about nature
- Thoughts related to quotes that have been heard or read
- Reactions to movies, books, articles
- Plans