



What is Health and Wellness Coaching: Might it be Beneficial for Me?

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What does peak wellness look like to you? Are you performing at your maximum ability, eating well and keeping active? Or, is it feeling calm and balance under stress, positive and optimistic towards life and/or fully engaged and satisfied with life? People want to feel well and how one defines wellness is very personal. People want to be in control of their health, to feel good about themselves and to have more vitality. Health and Wellness Coaches are practitioners who help people make behavioral changes to achieve these wellness goals.

The process of health and wellness coaching begins with helping an individual identify what they truly desire in their life and what is most meaningful to him/her. The next step is to help develop a personal wellness goals and a self-directed plan to get there. Basically, health and wellness coaches guide people to connect the dots between “point A” where they are now and “point B” where they want to be in life, especially when making changes is difficult. This is accomplished by setting realistic goals that lead to small victories that lay the foundation for greater confidence to achieve bigger goals. The key requirement for successful outcomes is the desire to make changes and a commitment to act.

Health and wellness coaches work with people who want to invest in their personal well-being, are willing to do the work required to get them where they want to go, and who will take full responsibility for their life and the decisions

they make. The process starts with a health and well-being assessment to gain personal awareness and insight and to inform the coach of key issues, including medical conditions. During the first coaching session, the client identifies priorities; develops a personal wellness plan that includes a long-range vision as well as shorter term goals. The coach and client define the first steps, and it's onward and upward from there! During subsequent coaching sessions – either weekly, monthly or quarterly, coaches and clients review the progress towards the vision, explore and resolve the most pressing issues, and set more goals. Health and wellness coaches foster self-acceptance and self-confidence. They can encourage, problem-solve, engage, energize and challenge people to set higher goals when the moment is right. Collaboration, accountability and support, characterize typical sessions. By the end of three months, clients can expect to reach most of their short-term goals, feel more confident and ready to take on new challenges with or without coaching.

Health and wellness coaches can be particularly helpful for people living with MS. Chronic diseases, such as MS, require ongoing self-management in many areas of life. Due to the unpredictable nature of MS, maintaining focus and having a sense of control can provide needed self-confidence and a positive outlook, especially during difficult set-backs. Coaches can benefit those living with MS, who might feel stuck, to move forward when life circumstances are overwhelming. This is achieved by helping reignite motivation, explore solutions and brainstorm possibilities for meeting unique life challenges that people with MS face. Coaches can address with their MS clients' concerns such as managing fatigue, reaching fitness/activity goals, improving relationships, reducing stress, achieving emotional stability, building resilience and adopting overall positive behaviors. Accountability is an important part of self-management. Working on goal setting and self-discovery with a coach helps keep clients moving forward toward positive change.

Health and wellness coaches are trained to use science-based tools and coaching psychology. Coaches collaborate and partner with clients to encourage personal responsibility, reflective thinking, self-discovery and self-control. They do not analyze problems, prescribe solutions and treatments or replace the need for

medical or psychological intervention. Referral to a specialist for these is sometimes necessary.

There is growing evidence and research specific to the benefit of health and wellness coaching. Chronic disease related to unhealthy lifestyle choices account for many deaths in our nation. Healthcare costs associated with lifestyle-related conditions account for a big slice of our nation's budget. Taking control of one's health and making an investment in our own well-being is poised to be a dominant societal theme of the future. Effective interventions to maximize health and to help prevent and treat chronic diseases are available. Health and Wellness coaching can help access these interventions.

The most comprehensive compendium of research literature regarding wellness coaching is found in the American Journal of Lifestyle Medicine:

Sforzo, Kaye, Torodova et al. (2017) Compendium of Health and Wellness Coaching. Am J Lifestyle Med. On-Line First.

<http://journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.1177/1559827617708562>

Although some health insurance companies cover 'wellness coaching' using on-line tutorial approaches, nothing compares to personalized, collaborative health and wellness coaching. At this time, insurance companies generally do not reimburse for this service, however people who have Health Savings Accounts, can use this money to pay for any health-related expenses, including health and wellness coaching.

To determine whether you are ready, willing and able to take the next step to work with a health and wellness coach, it is important to ask yourself a few questions.

- Do I have the time, energy and desire to invest in myself now?
- Do I have the support I need to make changes in my life?
- Am I ready and willing to do the work required to get where I want to go in my life?

If your answers are yes to these questions, then the next step is to locate a coach who is a good fit for you-- which can make all the difference in your success.

Questions to ask a potential coach are:

- What training, certification, and/or licenses do you have?
- How often do you work with people who have similar wellness goals as mine? Do you have experience working with clients who are living with a chronic condition?
- What is your specialty or area of expertise?
- What is your philosophy about wellness and wellness coaching?
- Can I see you in-person, by phone or both?
- What are your rates?
- How long have you been a wellness coach?

Some coaches offer a 'free trial' which includes a free session to give both parties a chance to see if they are a good match for each other. Ultimately, coaching is based on establishing and maintaining a relationship of rapport, trust and unfailing positive regard.

Along with asking your physician or neurologist for a referral, qualified health and wellness coaches can be found through the International Coaching Federation and/or Wellcoaches websites among others. These websites help you to refine your search in finding a coach who will meet your needs:

- coachfederation.org/need/landing.cfm?ItemNumber=747&navItemNumber=565
- wellcoacheschool.com/find-coach/