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# Core 1: Better Health for Individuals



## Pearson Australia

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SAMPLE

## Unit one

# What does health mean to individuals?



# Meanings of health

Health refers to a balance of the physical, emotional, mental, social and spiritual aspects of life. This balance helps to ensure the satisfaction, happiness and overall wellbeing of an individual.

In 1946, the World Health Organisation (WHO) defined health as:

*'a state of complete physical, mental and social wellbeing and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity'.*

This definition remains widely used as it emphasises health as a positive experience and places it in a broad social context.



## CRITICAL THINKING ACTIVITY

1 Write your own definition of health.

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2 Study the stimulus material supplied by your teacher. Identify the differences in people's attitude to health over time. Suggest why their ideas have changed.

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3 Why does health involve more than just physical activity?

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4 Can a disabled person be considered healthy?

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5 Do you feel that you have the same level of health from day to day or even from hour to hour?

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6 How could someone's physical health affect their mental health?

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7 List ten healthy behaviours.

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8 How do these healthy behaviours differ from those in the stimulus material supplied by your teacher?

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9 What does this tell you about the nature of health in different countries?

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## Dimensions of health

In the past, health was considered to be merely the absence of disease. If you looked healthy, that is, had no physical signs of disease, then you were considered to be healthy. Today we recognise that health is much more than just looking good. Health is actually made up of five different dimensions:

- physical health
- social health
- mental health
- emotional health
- spiritual health.

Each dimension of health interacts with and affects the other dimensions. For example, mental health impacts on our physical health when we are so stressed that we become physically ill. Physical health can impact on our relationships (social health) when we are feeling listless and, as a result, do not want to interact with friends.

A healthy person relates confidently and sensitively to others and their environment. They also have the ability to maintain meaningful relationships and to make good decisions. Knowing how and why physical fitness contributes to health is important to healthy individuals. Spiritual strength is demonstrated in both the values and actions of a balanced and happy person.

Physical health is how well the body functions and the absence of disease. What you eat, whether or not you exercise and how well you recover from illness are all part of physical health. Our physical health is very important because it links closely to risk factors for many lifestyle diseases, such as coronary heart disease and diabetes.

Mental health is receiving a great deal of attention from the government at present. Mental illness affects about 20 per cent of all Australians at some time in their lives. It impacts on their physical health (e.g. anorexia nervosa) and also on their relationships (e.g. schizophrenia). Having good mental health means having no symptoms or behaviours, associated in most cases with distress, which interfere with daily functioning. Individuals with good mental health cope with everyday problems and challenges, and handle stress in a non-destructive way. Mental health is similar to emotional health. Both involve liking and accepting yourself, and being able to express your feelings and control your behaviour.

Social health is demonstrated by our ability to get along with other people. Developing and maintaining positive relationships with friends and family, at school and in the local community, all demonstrate social health. Relating to a range of people and being concerned for others is part of our social health.

Spiritual health involves having strong beliefs and a purpose in life. Knowing our inner selves and respecting life are aspects of spiritual health. It may also involve a religious belief.

Health is a result of complex interactions between each of the five dimensions. As one dimension improves, so too might another in an indirect way. For example, a person begins an exercise program that increases their physical fitness (physical health) and at the same time feels better about themselves because their body looks better (emotional health). This person might also feel new confidence to interact with others (social health). Poor health in one area can lead to other areas suffering. For example, a person with low self-esteem might talk themselves into feelings of inferiority (mental health) and no longer enjoy interaction with others (social health). A breakdown in one dimension of health generally lowers effectiveness in the other dimensions.



## Relative and dynamic nature of health

Health status continually changes. We can go to bed feeling fine and wake up the next morning with a sore throat and cough. This is the dynamic nature of health. Your interactions with others, your participation in exercise and the dietary choices you make can all influence and change your health status. You can go from perfectly healthy to seriously ill overnight (e.g. in the case of a car accident or drug misuse) or more gradually (e.g. in the case of lifestyle diseases such as lung cancer). The choices and decisions we make every day are hopefully contributing to an optimal level of health.

Health is also relative, which means it can be compared among people. Comparisons are made by young people to the elderly. The elderly might compare themselves to their peers. The government compares the health status of different population groups (e.g. Indigenous Australians or rural dwellers). Nations compare their health status to those of other countries.

Each individual has an optimal level of health that can be altered by circumstances. For example, an individual in a wheelchair can still lead a full and satisfying life. Relatively however, this person's level of health might not be as good as an able-bodied triathlete. Consider an infant in a developing nation. Relative to its own people it might have an optimal level of health. However, relative to an Australian infant, its health status is poor. Your health can also be relative to yourself. For example, a retired footballer might say that their health status is now lower because they are no longer as physically fit.



**PERSONAL REFLECTION**

- 1 How has your own health changed over time? Complete a health continuum recounting any illness or diseases you may have had at various ages. This will help to describe the dynamic nature of your own health.

*Birth*



*Present*

SAMPLE

2 How would your health change if...

- you moved from the city to the country?

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- your parents were both out of work?

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- you moved interstate?

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- you lost the use of your legs?

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- you had to move out on your own?

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- you had to leave school and work full time?

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This activity helps us to understand that health is relative according to a person's individual circumstances. You are healthy today in terms of the circumstances you are living in. If these circumstances changed, so might your health status.

# Perceptions of health

Studies have shown that a person's perception of their own health can be a powerful predictor of their future health and survival. According to the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, from 2004 to 2005, 70 per cent of young people in Australia aged 15 to 24 years assessed their own health status as being excellent or good. Twenty-four per cent rated their health as good and only 7 per cent gave their health a rating of fair or poor.



## PERSONAL REFLECTION

Perceptions of your own health

Complete the following survey investigating your personal health status. On completion of the survey, construct your own personal health status report card.

	<b>Ranking</b> (1=strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree)				
	1	2	3	4	5
My health is excellent.					
I'm as healthy as anybody I know.					
I feel about as good now as I ever have.					
I have never been seriously ill.					
When there is something going around, I can usually avoid catching it.					
In the near future I expect to have better health than other people I know.					
I expect to have a very healthy life.					
My health is a priority in my life.					
I try to avoid letting illness interfere with my life.					
It doesn't bother me to go to the doctor.					

Report grade:

Comments:



**CRITICAL THINKING ACTIVITY**

1 Investigate the perceptions other people have of your health. Ask five people who know you quite well to assign you a grade for your health from an A+ to a D-.

Name	Health grade

2 Do other people have the same perceptions of your health as you do? Discuss reasons behind the similarities and differences.

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## Perceptions of the health of others

We all hold general perceptions of the health of groups within society. These perceptions may or may not be accurate. Most perceptions we have are linked to our own experiences, or are influenced by media, education and other influences.



### DISCUSSION ACTIVITY

Poster walk

Study the posters placed around the room. Each poster is dedicated to the health status of one population group. Move around the room, adding your ideas to each poster regarding your perception of their health. You might like to write words or comments, or draw images.

On completion, review and discuss the posters as a class. Consider the following questions.

- Do you think the perceptions of health that you hold are accurate?
- On what do you base your perceptions?
- Have your perceptions been influenced by your own particular experiences?
- Do you believe that some population groups have a worse health status than your own?
- Do you believe that some population groups have a better health status than your own?
- How could the health status of others impact on you?

## Implications of different perceptions of health

Perceptions of health influence a person's behaviour, choices and priorities in life. They also influence governments, industries, communities and families in setting goals and targets in terms of health promotion and prevention. Establishing accurate perceptions of health is important if we are to direct our energies in the most effective manner.



### CRITICAL THINKING ACTIVITY

Considering different viewpoints

Read the following scenarios. Record the impact each of these people's perceptions may have.

*Sarah, a 17-year-old girl, considers herself to possess extremely healthy genes, as her great-grandmother is still alive and well, aged 94.*

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*The State Government, when setting next year's budget, perceives the health status of the elderly to be the highest priority. Some local governments however, have listed Indigenous health to be the highest priority.*

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*A 65-year-old patient is told by his doctor that he needs to make dramatic improvements to his health behaviours. However, the patient perceives his health to be much better than anyone else his age.*

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SAMPLE

*Teenagers who have received counselling report their mental health to be relatively good. However, because they have received counselling, the parents of these same teenagers class their mental health as being fair or poor.*

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