

Prevention Is Power: 7 Lifestyle Medicine Strategies for Career Sustainability

By Mary Wolf, MS, LPC-MH

Lifestyle Medicine has become one of my greatest passions, not only for my own health and wellbeing, but also for my counseling and coaching clients. As I work with dentists and team members, I see that many of the challenges of stress, fatigue, chronic health conditions, emotional exhaustion, and relationship struggles are influenced by the daily habits and choices that shape our lives.

What excites me most about Lifestyle Medicine is that it focuses on what we can do proactively. Rather than waiting until we are burned out or dealing with significant health concerns, Lifestyle Medicine gives us practical, evidence-based tools to improve our physical, emotional, mental, and spiritual wellbeing. Small changes practiced consistently can create remarkable results over time.

With my clients, I often focus on sleep quality and sleep routines first. With this as a priority, the other pillars often get easier. Lifestyle Medicine is an evidence-based approach that focuses on daily habits that prevent disease, improve quality of life, and support long-term wellbeing.

Reflect on your own health with these seven pillars:

1. Whole Food, Plant-Predominant Nutrition

Nutrition is the foundation of health. Emphasizing vegetables, fruits, whole grains, legumes, nuts, and seeds while limiting ultra-processed foods helps reduce inflammation, support gut health, and prevent chronic disease.

Reflection Questions:

- How often do I eat foods that truly fuel my energy versus foods that simply get me through the day?
- What is one small nutrition change I could make this week that would support my health?

2. Physical Activity

Regular movement strengthens the body, improves cardiovascular health, supports mental wellbeing, and enhances energy and resilience.

Reflection Questions:

- Am I moving enough throughout my workday?
- What form of movement brings me joy and is realistic for this season of life?

3. Restorative Sleep

Quality sleep allows the body and brain to recover, regulate hormones, consolidate memory, and support immune function.

Reflection Questions:

- Do I wake up feeling rested and energized most mornings?
- What habit may be interfering with my ability to get quality sleep?

4. Stress Management

Developing skills to regulate the nervous system helps build resilience and improve wellbeing.

Reflection Questions:

- What are the first signs that tell me my stress level is becoming unhealthy?
- What healthy strategy helps me reset when I feel overwhelmed?

5. Positive Social Connections

Meaningful and reciprocal relationships contribute to emotional health, resilience, and longevity.

Reflection Questions:

- Who are the people I can call when I need support or encouragement?
- Am I investing enough time and energy into the relationships that matter most?

6. Avoidance of Risky Substances

Reducing or eliminating tobacco, excessive alcohol, and other harmful substances supports optimal physical and mental health.

Reflection Questions:

- Are any of my coping habits creating more problems than they solve?
- What healthier alternatives could I use to manage stress, frustration, or fatigue?

7. Purpose, Meaning, and Spiritual Wellbeing

Living in alignment with one's values, purpose, and beliefs fosters resilience, hope, and fulfillment.

Reflection Questions:

- What aspects of my work and life give me the greatest sense of purpose and meaning?
- Am I spending enough time on activities and relationships that align with my values?

Build Your Own Wellbeing Strategy

The South Dakota Dental Association's Be Well Program offers all dentists and team members access to three free and confidential counseling or executive coaching sessions with me. Common topics include work-life integration, boundaries, communication styles, healthy habits, decision making, and leadership development.

You do not have to figure it out alone!

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Your wellbeing matters! Self-Care is Patient Care.

**American College of Lifestyle Medicine