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Health and Wellness By Molly Andoe

A healthy lifestyle requires a conscious awareness of what feeds into our own health and wellness. It is difficult to maintain our health at times, especially when our world changes in the blink of an eye. Stress, anxiety, grief and loss, and other concerns tend to rush in, leaving little space for a 'take care of yourself' mentality. In order to combat this type of burnout, it is important that we remind ourselves to pause, breathe, and evaluate what is the biggest factor affecting our lives, and take steps to maintain a healthy and positive attitude.

If you are noticing any signs of strain in your wellness, evaluate your emotional and physical health.

One thing that can prove beneficial is a staple of VMI life —- regular exercise. This is a widely recognized and proven way to improve physical health. Exercise can lead to a healthier body because it reduces risk of illness and injury by building up cardiovascular strength and overall muscle movement. Working out also releases chemicals, endorphins that increase internal wellness and mental stability and boost mood.

It is important to note, however, that "wellness" does not solely refer to physical wellness, but mental fortitude can be equally important. Mental health is a significant factor in maintaining your personal health. There are a few things to consider when looking at your mental fortitude , including social and emotional factors. Social health relates to your interactions with other people. Whether you are an introvert and like to have one or two close relationships or an extrovert with many interpersonal relationships, the way to maintain your social health is to make those relationships positive. Interactions in your life should leave you feeling good about yourself and those around you.

Your emotional health can be affected by your social and physical health. If either of these aspects of wellness are negatively influenced, it can lead to instability in your mental health.

Being attentive to your mental health can greatly increase your outlook on life and your overall wellness. If you are noticing any signs of strain in your wellness, evaluate your emotional and physical health. Try relaxation techniques like deep breathing, progressive muscle relaxation, or taking a walk. These simple but necessary tasks are important to maintaining wellness. If you feel you need greater support, stop by the Center for Cadet Counseling, located on the 2nd floor of the VMI hospital to set up an appointment to speak with a counselor about your concerns.

Eating Disorders Awareness the VMI Infirmary

An eating disorder is a condition associated with abnormal eating habits and consuming too many or too few calories. It can affect one's mental and physical health. Eating too few calories is called anorexia. Some people make themselves throw up after eating, which is called bulimia. Over-exercising is another common behavior that might be used to control caloric expenditure. Not everyone with an eating disorder is a female or underweight. Up to 10% of those with eating disorders are males who more commonly use over-exercising to control their weight. Some men restrict calories in an unhealthy manner so that their muscle lines can more easily be seen. Someone might appear normal and still have disordered eating. If you are concerned that you or someone you know has an eating disorder, please visit the infirmary to speak with a nurse. An eating disorder is not only unhealthy, it can destroy your life. There is help available.

Spring Break—Safety Tips

As spring break approaches, college students across the nation are planning, gearing up, and getting 'psyched' for fun with family and friends. We recognize that this is a time for 'letting off steam', relaxation, and enjoying the company of loved ones; Without anyone telling you to shine your shoes, roll your hay, or get your trousers mended, you still need to keep some things in mind. **For most VMI cadets, this time is a safe time to relax and have fun. For others, difficult decisions can cloud clear judgment.** The Cadet Peer Educators want to remind you of some important tips to stay safe during your spring break, and on St. Patrick's Day.

- Stay **Hydrated**. Whether in the sun or on the slopes, you need to remember to hydrate. Comfort foods like home cooking or physical exertion can cause dehydration, as can consumption of alcohol. Remember to refuel with water as you refuel your body.
- Stay in a **Group**. It is important to look out for yourself and those you hang with. Keep in mind that there are dangerous situations in every town, and be mindful of this. Don't let your friend walk or take a cab alone. Always be an extra resource to help your friends and family stay safe.
- Get some **Exercise**. It will be harder to return to VMI if you bum around during break.
- **911 is not the same in all countries**. 080=911 in Mexico. Make sure you know how to contact authorities in the event of an emergency, no matter where you are.
- **Medications**: If you take medication (i.e. birth control, antibiotics, ADHD medications, etc.) make sure you pack enough for your trip, and you know the contraindications. [Birth control increases your sensitivity to the sun, as do antibiotics).
- **Condoms** – Currently one out of five college students have an STD, which is one souvenir that nobody wants… if you choose to be sexually active, make smart decisions regarding you and your partner's own health.

Eating Disorders, Revealed

For a free and confidential online assessment, visit www.vmi.edu/assessment and click on "VMI Mental Health Screening Tool"

Throughout the US, people are becoming more and more conscientious of their bodies. The media imposes great pressure on men to be muscular and lean, and women to be thin and fragile. Unfortunately, a lot of these images are unhealthy and unattainable, yet they still put pressure on Americans to be slimmer, to eat less, and to be body aware.
Eating disorders can affect anyone; the girl who wants that perfect bikini body, or that guy who wants those six pack abs and big muscles. As the infirmary's article already pointed out, Eating Disorders are serious, life-threatening illnesses — not choices.

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Disordered Eating

Disordered eating involves unhealthy habits over time that can lead up to, but may not yet fit the medical diagnoses of an eating disorder.

- Preoccupation with food, caloric intake, and weight
- Increase in the criticism of one's body
- Lack of self-identity, low self esteem
- Extreme loss or fluctuations in weight
- Avoidance of eating in public
- Excessive use of laxatives / supplements
- Engaging in physical activity above and beyond the requirements of training program
- Bloodshot eyes, swollen parotid glands
- Thinning hair or hair loss
- Mood swings
- Headaches, dizziness, numbness, and tingling down the limbs (as a result of electrolyte imbalances)

Distorted Body Image

This is an inaccurate perception of one's weight / body mass status. This can be seen in any athlete with a rigid system of weight training and in women who feel pressure to conform to mainstream media.

- Distress regarding physical appearance
- Excess verbal complaints of weight/muscle mass
- Unusual or extreme dieting behaviors
- Focusing on appearance, spending a lot of time analyzing one's body.
- Perfectionistic thinking in regards to body image
- Men in sports with weight requirements (wrestlers, jockeys, etc.)
- Difficulty accepting compliments
- Unhappy outlook

If you or someone you know is struggling with an eating disorder, help is always available. **The Center for Cadet Counseling is able to meet and discuss concerns and treatment goals.** You can also visit the National Eating Disorder Association website and take a free, confidential online screening. **Eating disorders are serious and can be fatal –help prevent or get help for someone suffering this illness today!**