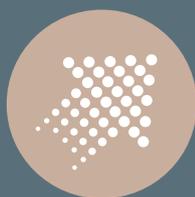


# The Seven Key Pillars of Health and Wellbeing

by Sandie Dennis



**BeyondEAP**

Specialist employee support  
for life's toughest challenges

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In today's society,  
we have come to  
understand that  
the word "health"  
doesn't solely  
describe our  
physical state.

"Health" can also refer to the emotional, mental, and even social aspects of ourselves (as many of us discovered during lockdown!)

It is the combination of these crucial factors that paint a comprehensive picture of our health and wellbeing.

Many employees have been referred to me for support over the years, due to their unhealthy reactions to stress. These reactions can occur on a daily basis, with the employee usually only sleeping for a few hours. They then feel too tired and unmotivated to exercise, turning to foods with little nourishment.

Mix in some external influences, such as an unwell parent or the death of a loved one, add a dash of unhappiness in other areas of life, and you are left with a uniquely personalised 'toxic cocktail'.



Over time, your toxic cocktail may lead to more complex issues; emotional or anxiety disorders, depression, chronic long-term conditions, addictions, and ultimately, complicated illnesses such as cancer.

I speak from experience, as twenty years ago, this was the exact position I suddenly found myself in.



# Sadly, no one gets to travel through life unscathed by challenge.

However, building a foundation of physical and emotional resilience, along with prioritising self-care, can be genuinely transformative.

These elements can also provide solutions for life's knocks, leading you naturally towards a healthier and more fulfilling life.

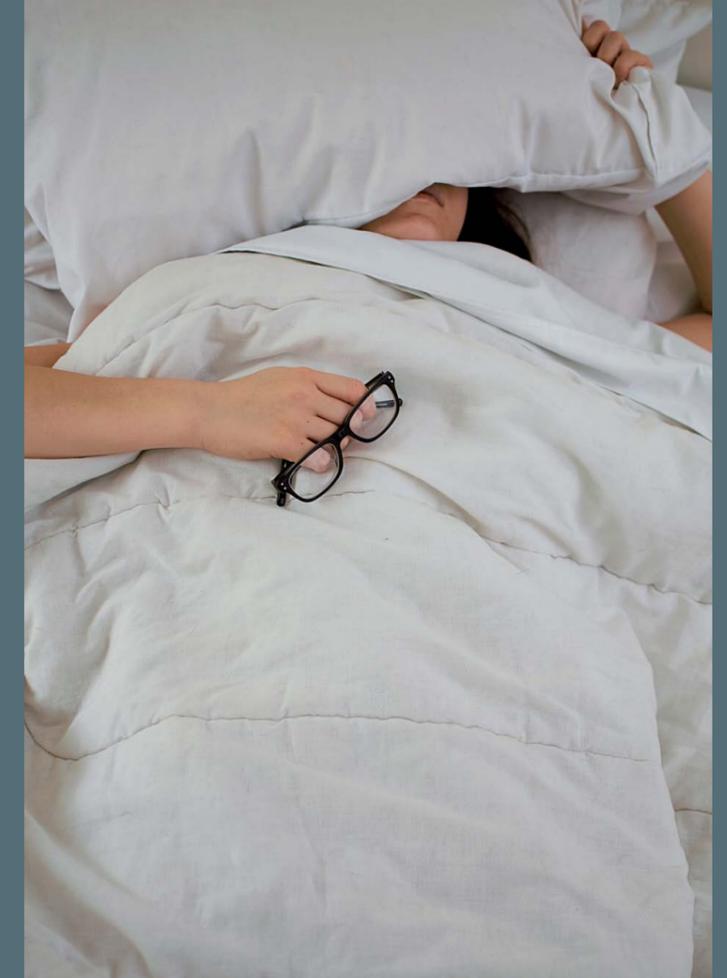
This eBook exists because I want to discuss the seven key pillars that have been so transformative for me, and which I have subsequently used to help employees turn their lives around.

## Pillar One: How Have You Been Sleeping?

This is one of the first questions I ask an employee who has been referred to me.

Generally, their answers follow the same theme: "shocking", "I can't sleep until past 3am" or, "I wake up really early, then I can't go back to sleep".

Sleep is Pillar One because it is the ultimate key to your whole wellbeing. Without it, your emotional, mental, and physical wellness suffers, collapsing like a house of cards.



Deep sleep is also restorative, removing physical and emotional toxins from our bodies. A simple lack of sleep has been the primary cause of many cases of premature heart disease, and inflammation to the gut biome, which is associated with many chronic illnesses.

I feel so passionate about this essential area of health, that I've created a separate eBook to discuss sleep in further depth, which you can [access here](#).



## Pillar Two: Regulate Your Emotions

Previously, I would have called emotional regulation 'stress management'.

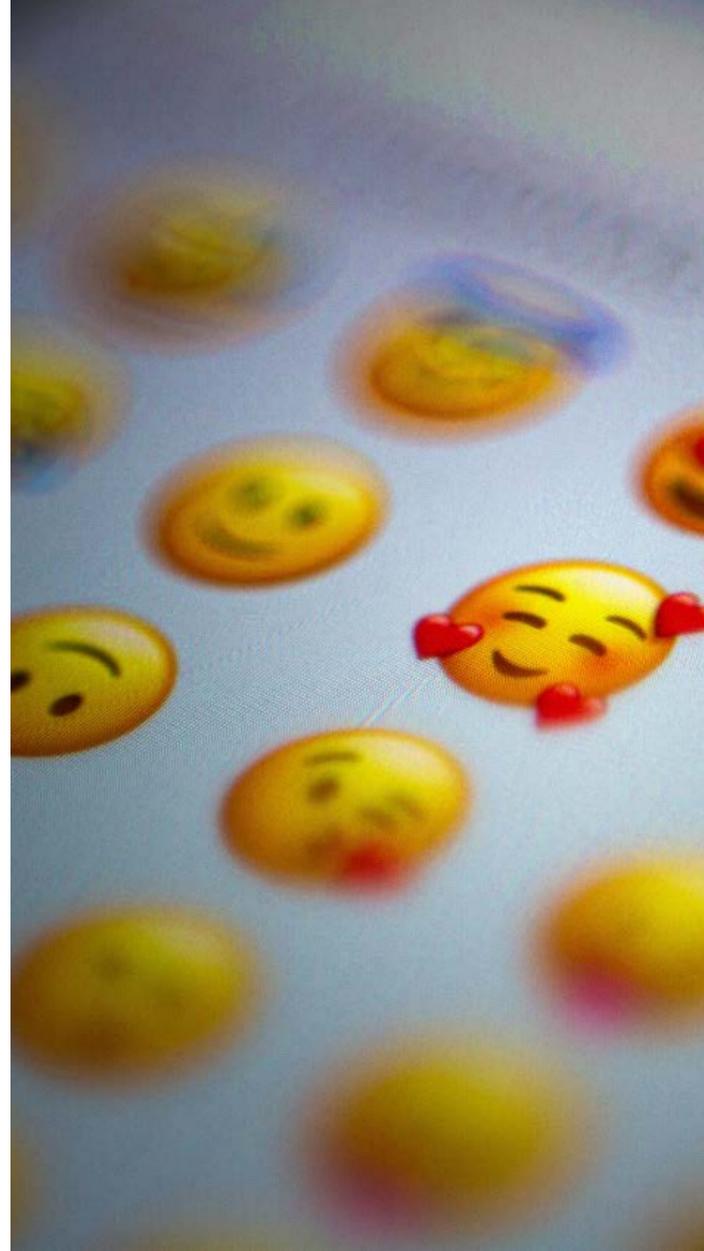
Over the years, I have come to realise that our emotions regarding a particular situation causes the 'trigger' that activates a stress response.

This means it's important to go back to basics, examining which emotions are the most pressing force in your life. These dictate your actions, igniting every thought and intention you have.

In employee sessions, I travel deep into the neuroscience of different areas of the brain, to help provide an understanding of where, why, and how certain emotions can activate a stress response in the body.

We can then start to reframe their thinking, so the employee is able to make healthier emotional choices before their brain can slip down the 'emotional rabbit-hole'.

Here are some simple ways for you to begin practising emotional regulation:



**When you feel an emotional trigger**, take deep diaphragmatic breaths to calm your stress response – the 'fight or flight' feeling we all know so well – and reignite the parasympathetic system to rest and digest.

Feel your muscles relax, and your heart rate slowing down, as you remind yourself that this too will pass.

**Remember that your brain has had years of practice in repeating negative thoughts.** STOP the next negative thought in its tracks by actively telling it to calm down, forcing it from your mind, and replacing it with positive self-talk or an affirmation.

(Don't worry if this feels difficult at first; it will take practice to find the 'choice-point', but when you **do, the** benefits will be numerous.)

You could also find a trusted friend to talk to, or write down your feelings in a journal, rather than bottling them up.

Finally, try your best to view the bigger picture; will you care about this particular issue in five years' time? Is it robbing you from enjoying the moment you are in right now?



## Pillar Three: Practise Regular Mindfulness

Daily mindfulness has been shown to change our biology on a genetic level, preventing inflammation in the body.

Better still, it doesn't involve long or complicated processes. Mindfulness is simply about focusing your attention on the present moment, accepting it without judgment.

By practising mindfulness regularly, you will be better able to savour life's pleasures as they happen.

You may also be less likely to get caught up in worries about things to come, or regrets over things that were... and wouldn't that be wonderful?

## Pillar Four: Find the Right Nutrition (or, Nourishment)

Recent research has discovered that 5% of our biological make-up indicates a predisposition to certain genes, including the cancer gene.

Yet 95% of illness is related to lifestyle factors, which means that to a certain extent, the right nourishment can change the population of our gene expression, protecting against ailments, and potentially reversing many illnesses.

For example, green leafy vegetables, such as kale, spinach, and broccoli, contain Vitamin K, lutein,

folate, and beta carotene, all of which protect the heart and blood vessels whilst lowering our risk of dementia and cognitive decline.

Making healthy food choices can also transform your energy, improving your sense of wellbeing.

Don't forget to combine healthy eating with drinking plenty of water – around 8 to 10 glasses per day will help your body eliminate wastes and toxins, and assist your biological processes.

## Pillar Five: Move More

It's important to move in ways that suit you best, and that you can enjoy. I practise different types of movement every day, from walking, yoga and Pilates, to tai chi.

I think "movement" sounds gentler than "exercise", which can seem to some employees as though they suddenly have to run a marathon!

In fact, even the simplest movement practices offer a wealth of wellbeing benefits, including improved sleep and a more positive mindset.

But if you really want to send those happiness chemicals soaring, try to move in nature, whether that's taking an invigorating dip in the sea, or walking in a beautiful scenic area.



## Pillar Six: Evaluate Your Social Health

I don't have to explain how the Covid lockdown, and an enforced lack of social contact, has affected our health and wellbeing.

Recent events have revealed, on a global level, just how important healthy relationships are. They nurture us and help us grow.

However, like many of the employees I work with, you may have used the time in lockdown to evaluate your relationships, looking more closely at the emotional energy you use to maintain them.

While healthy relationships reduce stress and improve our wellbeing, it's important to be selective about how – and on whom – your emotional energy is spent.



## Pillar Seven: What Do You Care About?

Passion, purpose, meaning, and fulfilment are aspects of life that I take seriously, and I discuss them regularly with the employees I work with.

This involves taking a closer look at their core values and motivations, what they love doing, and homing in on their healthy relationships... in essence, we find out who they really are!

Finding and experiencing meaning through self-realisation and self-awareness can be an incredible breakthrough for a troubled employee, as they finally discover the things that are important to them, and how and why they live their life in a particular way.

This process of self-discovery also means that they can start to find a sense of happiness, and they feel able to strive for it each day.

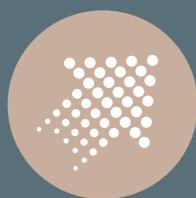
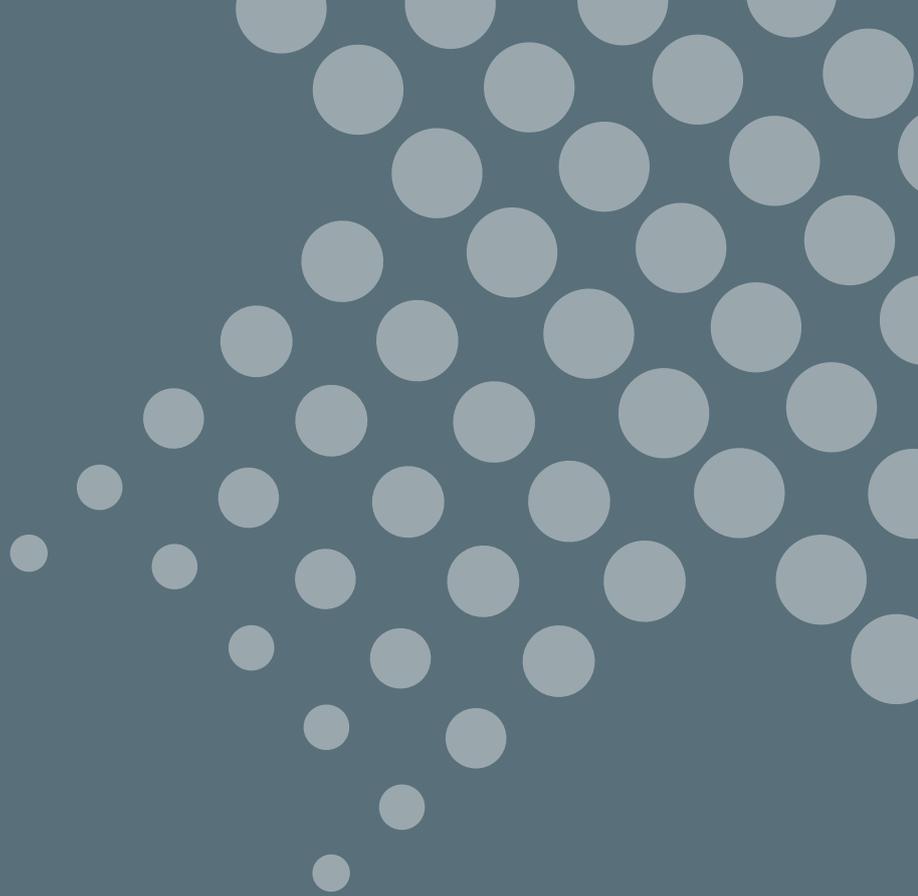
As you've probably noticed, practising these seven key pillars of health and wellbeing are easy enough to implement right away – so what's stopping you?

If I can help you with any questions surrounding these pillars, or you would like to discuss an employee issue in confidence, please get in touch for a no-obligation chat.

With my best wishes,

Sandie Dennis

Founder, Beyond EAP



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