

1 What Does It Mean To Be Healthy?

GOAL To understand that you must take care of all parts of your self to be healthy

GET STARTED ▶

If you are hurt or sick, your body is unhealthy. What if you are so angry with someone that you cannot talk to them? What if you are sad or have trouble concentrating? Being healthy is more than physical—it is more than having a working body. You must also have a healthy mind and spirit.



Being healthy means taking care of your mind, your emotions, and your spirit, as well as your body.



Medicine

Medicine is everything we know and do to maintain good health and to treat people when they are unhealthy. Medicine also refers to objects, drugs, or activities used to prevent or treat health problems. Different cultures have different beliefs about how to keep the body, mind, and spirit healthy.

Eastern Medicine

Chinese medicine believes that the body is healthy when it is balanced. Many things in the environment can upset your body's balance, such as extreme changes in temperature, stress, and toxins. Chinese medicine finds the cause of the imbalance and then treats the cause.

Like traditional Chinese medicine, Ayurveda medicine stresses a balance of your body, mind, and spirit to be healthy. *Ayurveda*, which means “knowledge of life,” is a traditional East Indian medicine. Ayurveda believes disease is caused by an imbalance or stress in your mind or spirit. Treatment involves making a lifestyle change, such as dealing with anger, which will restore balance to your body, mind, and spirit.

i Traditional Chinese medicine believes that there are two opposite but complementary forces in the body. These are called *yin* and *yang*. The *yin* and *yang* must be balanced for a person to be healthy.

First Nations and Métis Medicine

First Nations and Métis medicine is based on a view of the human body as a whole that cannot be divided. A First Nations and Métis understanding is **holistic** because it considers the body and the person as one whole being. A human being has four interconnected aspects: body, mind, spirit, and emotions. Together they form a whole person. Elders teach that a balance of these four aspects is needed to be healthy. When you are unhealthy, one of these aspects is out of balance. People can become unhealthy if they pay attention to only the mental and physical aspects. They forget to look after the spiritual and emotional aspects of their being. They often do not know how to show and deal with their feelings appropriately.

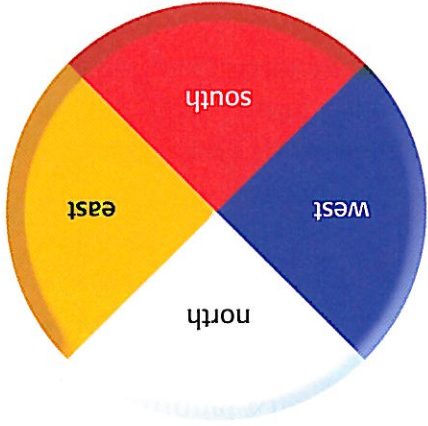
In some First Nations cultures, this holistic view is represented by a **Medicine Wheel**. A **Medicine Wheel** is a symbol used by some First Nations to teach. It is based on the four directions: east, south, west, and north. These are the four aspects of Mother Earth. The Medicine Wheel can also represent the four aspects of a human being: mental, spiritual, emotional, and physical (as told by Dakota Elder Velma Goodfeather). The Medicine Wheel teaches about the holistic never-ending Circle of Life (represented by the unbroken circle).

First Nations and Métis people also understand a human being as part of a larger whole—everything and everyone around us. To be a healthy human being, we must have good relationships with other people, animals, plants, and the land.

Western Medicine

Western medicine, which is what most medical doctors and nurses in Canada practice, is based on a scientific view of the body. When scientists look at the human body, they see parts and systems. Scientists study the body in detail. They try to understand how each part works, and how it connects to and works with other parts. The scientific view of the body is different from the holistic view, which considers the body and the person as one whole.

Today, many medical doctors also have a more holistic view of health and the body. They agree that good health is more than being physically fit or the absence of disease. Being healthy means being well physically, mentally, and emotionally. It means being in harmony with everything and everyone in your environment.



Each First Nation has its own set of teachings related to the Medicine Wheel. Most teachings are related to the number four—directions, seasons, and stages of life.