

# healthy **U**



## Fostering the holistic wellbeing of Vanderbilt faculty and staff

### Pillars of Wellbeing



Emotional

Career

Social

Financial

Physical



Emotional – Generating the emotions that lead to good feelings



Career – Pursuing your interests, values, and purpose in order to gain happiness and enrichment professionally



Social – Developing meaningful relationships and maintaining a support network that helps to overcome loneliness



Financial – Fully meeting current finances and feeling secure in our future costs



Physical – Improving the function of your body to ensure health, and avoid preventable illness

## Social Wellbeing is Essential

Jim Kendall, LCSW, CEAP | Manager | Work/Life Connections – EAP  
21 years of service

Social wellness is an essential component of our overall wellbeing. As humans, we are wired to connect to others and these connections affect our health. In fact, having good social connections has been shown to not only improve our health, but to help us live longer. A University of Michigan study showed that lack of social connection is a greater detriment to health than obesity, smoking, and high blood pressure. In addition, cultivating and nurturing relationships with others influences how emotionally resilient we can be in the face of a crisis.

Biologically, social ties stimulate the release of oxytocin, a hormone that has been linked with the reduction of fear and anxiety, in part by limiting the cortisol response to stress. Conversely, the lack of social connections has been associated with depression and cognitive decline in one's later years. A large Swedish study of people ages 75 and over concluded that the risk of dementia was lowest in those with a variety of satisfying contacts with friends and relatives. Having a support network of friends and family can help people get through periods of trauma and improve our ability to respond to stress.

The quality of our relationships with other people is equally significant. There are a multitude of factors that put people at higher or lower risk for suicide. Connectedness is one of these factors, which the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) defines as “The degree to which a person or group is socially close, interrelated or shares resources with other persons or groups.” As such, good relationships can play a crucial role in protecting a person against suicidal thoughts and behaviors. Friendships offer several other mental health benefits, such as increased feelings of belonging and/

or purpose, increased levels of happiness, reduced levels of stress, and improved self-worth and confidence. It should be noted that social connection doesn't necessarily mean physically being present with people, but rather in the experience of feeling understood and connected.

One of the most effective ways to create healthy connections, as well as maintaining positive relationships, is to be fully present in the moment with the other person. This “mindful listening” makes people feel heard and understood. Maintaining meaningful lasting relationships require ongoing attention...really listening, adopting a nonjudgmental attitude, and offering your full attention to another allows both brains to attune to each other. It's easy to be distracted.

Being socially connected, especially in an increasingly isolated world, is more important than ever. The benefits of social connectedness shouldn't be overlooked.

# Join an Employee Affinity Group



Employee Affinity Groups, or EAGs, are created and facilitated by employees around interests, backgrounds, identities and common bonds to help foster a positive work environment at Vanderbilt and support the university's values specific to diversity, inclusion and campus engagement.

There are currently three EAGs available to Vanderbilt staff and faculty.

- Association of Vanderbilt Black Faculty and Staff
- LGBTQI+
- Golden Dores

For more information or to suggest a new group, visit the [Employee Affinity Group website](#) or contact [eag@vanderbilt.edu](mailto:eag@vanderbilt.edu).

## Sign up for 'Rooted in Learning'



Every Monday, the Employee Learning and Engagement team will send out an installment of "Rooted in Learning."

Each issue contains accessible opportunities for you to invest in your professional development. Resources include podcasts, books, TED talks, webinars, articles, virtual workshops, Skillsoft courses available through Oracle Learn and much more.

If you'd like to subscribe to the "Rooted in Learning" weekly newsletter, please send an email with "Subscribe" as the subject to [ele@vanderbilt.edu](mailto:ele@vanderbilt.edu). Please note that this is an opt-in newsletter, and you must subscribe to receive the weekly installment.

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# The Bearable Lightness of Wellbeing



Adriana Kipper-Smith, PhD. | Assistant Director for Clinical Services | University Counseling Center  
10 years of service

As the self-described "black lesbian feminist warrior mother" Audre Lorde so powerfully said, "I have come to believe that caring for myself is not self-indulgent. Caring for myself is an act of survival."

On Thanksgiving morning during a walk, the fiery bright red of this Japanese maple made me pause. Sigmund Freud once said that the transient nature of things makes us enjoy them even more. He nailed that part.

Thinking of emotional wellbeing made me realize how difficult it is to actually narrow it down. Philosophers of the mind, mental health providers, poets and social justice warriors all popped up, offering important reflections. Among them, that we tend to share a general understanding that wellbeing is the integrated result of physical and mental health. Yet the trickiest and most complex underpinnings of wellbeing, namely resilience, meaning and purpose, do not tend to come to mind as easily.



Most of us are acutely aware that this year has brought us a deadly pandemic, which is now accompanied by a mental health crisis—all within a backdrop of both latent and raw racial trauma, and political divisiveness. It has become increasingly difficult to stay grounded and connected with others and ourselves. In spite of this, resilience, meaning and purpose can emerge as the result of reflection and gratitude. It is an effortful and intentional goal, which can allow our focus to be on what we feel rather than on what we think we should feel. Not that simple.

This does not mean one has to focus on the good and bypass the bad so appreciation and gratitude ensue. Just as the brilliant Disney Pixar's *Inside Out*, the main message is that our feelings including sadness, fear, disgust, and rage, are powerful, and they all have important roles. Mindfully paying attention to them while trying to avoid over-identification (i.e., inaccurately assuming we are what we think, or that reality is limited to what one thinks) will not only allow fuzzy and warm feelings to emerge, but other layered ways to experience life, in all its multitude—hopefully with less shame and self-bullying, which self-criticism so masterfully fuels. Embracing tough emotions allows them to ground us in a more meaningful existence. Hard to believe, but that is where wellbeing tends to flourish.

Gratitude tends to emerge out of reflection—and it is attained, little by little, when we are able to let go of our expectations of others, which often leads to us feeling unfulfilled –and blah. Allowing ourselves to slow down enough to pay attention to our feelings may help us get in touch with what Kristin Neff called self-kindness, common humanity, and mindfulness, all pillars of self-compassion. It ultimately is an inside out exercise, not the other way around.

In spite of this crazy year, full of pain, grief, anxiety and rage, perhaps we can focus on what Lorde called an act of survival and make self-care –which is far more complex than bubble baths and chocolate—our current, most important ethical imperative. "We will never go back to normal. Normal never was," as Sonya Renee Taylor so poignantly said, and much more, referring to this year's pandemic. This year may have given us the chance to realign and reconnect. Maybe it is possible to pause and enjoy the colors of our surroundings while paying attention to what really matters.



# The Benefits of Playing Outside

Kathleen Seabolt, Ed.D. | Executive Director | Vanderbilt Child and Family Center | 3 years of service

Outside play is beneficial for children and adults! Being embraced by nature is a powerful experience, many find that just by taking a simple walk the stress of the day washes away. Even alone an individual can feel in community. On campus there are 53 white oak trees (*Quercus alba*) the symbol of the university. VCFC encourages our colleagues to take a daily stroll in beauty and wonder through [Vanderbilt's arboretum](#). Interested persons can access the [Vanderbilt Main Campus Tree Tour](#) through a QR reader or just take a walk; please wear a mask and practice at all times responsible social distancing.

The Acorn School offers a Nature Education program to young children. Aided by parents and community partners, this important initiative includes daily access to outdoor play spaces. It facilitates science learning and supports emotional wellbeing through gardening, predictions of light, shadow, wind and weather, and observing how seasons change the world of birds, insects, animals, and plants in our neighborhood. Rich and abundant opportunities for learning can be found simply walking through the arboretum, the children become knowledgeable about trees, how these are different and similar, by looking up the trunks through the canopy and looking down at roots and collecting fallen leaves and seeds on the ground. The Acorn preschool experience culminates in the K-Camp program the July before children matriculate to Kindergarten, a capstone month of all day outside explorations that empower children through risk and rigor to reinforce the 21st century skills (core competencies) of creativity, communication, collaboration and critical thinking.



Grateful that our friends from SPEAR visited The Acorn School playgrounds on the most recent in-service day to freshen our winter garden plots!



“In a multidisciplinary synthesis of empirical literature, Tremblay and colleagues (2015) conclude a consistent relationship exists between engaging in nature outside and healthy child development and suggest play in natural environments is more complex and diverse, gender neutral, and promotes more occurrences of moderate to vigorous physical activity. Spending time outside has positive effects on children’s cognitive, physical, emotional well-being, mental health, creativity, problem solving, self-regulation, resilience, and language (Evans, 2006; Louv, 2005; O’Brien & Murray, 2007; Tremblay et al, 2015; Wells, 2000). Nature can be a form of therapy for physical as well as psychological conditions (Louv, 2005). Studies involving childhood issues such as physical fitness and depression suggest a relationship between time outside and a decrease in these childhood concerns (Frost, 2006; Sallis & Glanz, 2006).” [https://naturalstart.org/sites/default/files/journal/ijecee\\_5\\_1\\_yanez\\_fees\\_torquati.pdf](https://naturalstart.org/sites/default/files/journal/ijecee_5_1_yanez_fees_torquati.pdf)

# Foods to Help You Sleep

Emily Cox, CHES | Health Educator | Health Plus | 5 years of service

Getting good sleep is incredibly important to your health. There are several strategies you can use to promote good sleep. One of those is being mindful of what you are (or aren't) eating and drinking. Fortunately, some foods contain sleep-promoting properties.

## Nutrients for Better Sleep

While more research is needed to conclude the specific role that foods play in sleep, their known effects are very promising. Many of these nutrients are available in supplement form, but it is always better to try to get nutrients from food first. Below are some nutrients we know to enhance sleep:

1. Magnesium reduces inflammation and relaxes muscles. It may also help reduce levels of cortisol (the stress hormone).
2. Calcium helps the brain make melatonin. Calcium-rich diets have been shown to help with insomnia.
3. Melatonin is a hormone that regulates sleep cycles. Tart cherries are the food source with the highest amount.
4. Vitamin D enhances sleep quality by promoting serotonin in the brain. Studies show low vitamin D levels cause insufficient sleep and daytime sleepiness.
5. Potassium increases sleep quality and reduces waking in the night. It also reduces muscle contractions and spasms which could interrupt sleep.
6. Tryptophan is an amino acid that increases the production of melatonin and serotonin. It has a natural sedative effect which can help you fall asleep faster and sleep better.
7. Protein helps tryptophan reach the brain and is associated with better sleep quality and less waking up during the night.

Dairy products such as milk, yogurt, cheese, and cottage cheese contain many of these nutrients, making them excellent natural sleep aids. Aim to consume three servings of low-fat or nonfat dairy throughout the day.

## Foods to Limit Before Bed

When it comes to foods that have a negative effect on sleep, white bread, refined pasta, and sugary baked goods are some of the worst offenders. Sugar can make your blood sugar levels fluctuate and give you a temporary energy boost before bed. Additional foods to limit include spicy foods, which may cause heartburn or reflux and prevent a restful sleep. High-fat dairy foods, such as ice cream, could interfere with sleep and slow down digestion.



## Beverages to Limit Before Bed

According to the National Sleep Foundation, consuming more than three 8-ounce cups of caffeine a day may impact sleep. Because the body takes about six hours to process and eliminate caffeine, drinking or eating foods with caffeine is not recommended within several hours of bedtime. People react to caffeine differently, so find a pattern that works for you. Alcohol can also disturb your rest by waking you up every few hours during the night and keeping you out of the deeper stages of sleep. Give your body three hours after your last drink to digest it.



Remember, focusing on how you eat all day is the first step toward better sleep. Eating too little during the day can lead to overeating at night, which could lead to discomfort and indigestion. If you eat too little at dinner, you might find yourself lying awake with a rumbling stomach. Eat balanced, nutritious meals and snacks evenly spaced throughout each day.

# fun fact

March is designated as  
**National Sleep Awareness Month**



# Benefits of Taking PTO

Vanderbilt's PTO (Paid Time Off) program allows you to use your time off in ways that suit you best. During the COVID-19 pandemic, employees may be focusing on maintaining their service and taking paid time off (PTO) may not be the first thing on their mind. Making use of your paid time off is an opportunity to detach yourself from work and reset.

Detachment from work is key and allows for an individual to care for themselves. Self-care is crucial for your wellbeing. You need to rest your body, your mind, and your connection to work so that you can return to the job refreshed to go. It is OK to use your time off. You have earned it!

To find your PTO balance or to schedule your time off, log into Oracle. Select the Time and Absences tile. To check your balance select the Absence Balance tile. Your balance is determined by your pay schedule. To add a PTO day, select Add Absence.

Employees should follow their department procedures when requesting time off. Visit [Paid Time Off | Policies | Human Resources | Vanderbilt University](#) for accruals and using PTO.

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## Pumpkin Cheesecake Smoothie

spotlight **RECIPE**

Emily Suttle, RD, LDN | Registered Dietitian  
Campus Dining - Business Affairs | 1 year of service

### INGREDIENTS

- 1 cup canned pumpkin
- 1 cup low-fat vanilla yogurt
- 1 cup milk or alternative milk
- ½ teaspoon ground cinnamon
- ¼ teaspoon vanilla extract
- 2 teaspoons sugar (optional)
- Sprinkle of nutmeg
- 1 cup of ice (optional)

### DIRECTIONS

- Combine all the ingredients except the nutmeg in a blender or food processor.
- Blend until smooth.
- Pour into a glass and garnish with a sprinkle of nutmeg.
- Freeze any leftovers.

Serving size: 1.5 cups

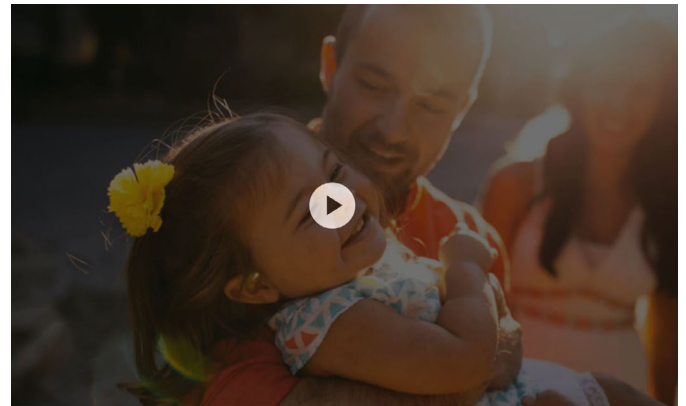


# Identify and Prioritize Your Savings Goals



spotlight **PODCAST**

Presented by Fidelity



Select the image to be taken to the podcast

## WHAT YOU WILL LEARN:

This workshop will help you start to think about the savings goals that are important to you and understand how you can achieve them.

## WHO SHOULD ATTEND:

Individuals who want to save for multiple financial goals

## AFTER THIS WORKSHOP, YOU SHOULD BE ABLE TO:

- Identify, prioritize and fund your savings goals
- Understand where to save for each goal
- Take your next best steps and save for your goals

# Employee COVID-19 Emergency Relief Fund



Vanderbilt University has established the [Vanderbilt University Employee COVID-19 Emergency Relief Fund](#) to assist employees with financial burdens that have been incurred as a result of COVID-19. Eligible employees can request reimbursements of up to \$500 for expenses related to family care, medical bills or alternative housing arrangements required for COVID-19 self-isolation or quarantine.

## ELIGIBILITY

Full-time benefits eligible VU-employed faculty (including Full Status, Partial Load faculty), full-time VU-employed staff who have completed 6 months of service, and VU-employed postdoctoral fellows are eligible to receive funds from the Vanderbilt University Employee COVID-19 Emergency Relief Fund if their annual base salary is below \$125,000.

**DID YOU**

**KNOW?**

# Partner with us!



Tell us about your favorite healthy resources, suggest a topic that you would love to learn more about, or share a healthy trend you've recently discovered.

Our wellbeing committee is here to serve you! We value every member of our community and look forward to learning, growing, and becoming healthier individuals together.

This newsletter is distributed to those who opt-in to this distribution list. Anyone wishing to opt-in may do so by emailing [wellbeing@vanderbilt.edu](mailto:wellbeing@vanderbilt.edu).

Connect with us on [Instagram](#) or like our [Facebook page](#)! Be sure to tag us using the hashtags #vandylife, #healthyu, #wellbeing and #vandygram.

To view previous editions of the wellbeing newsletter, please visit: <https://hr.vanderbilt.edu/wellbeing/wellbeing-newsletter.php>