

Children's health, wellbeing and lifestyle

Introduction

Children's health, wellbeing and lifestyle are closely interconnected and are shaped by a combination of biological, psychological, social and environmental factors. Rather than viewing health simply as the absence of illness, contemporary perspectives recognise that physical health, emotional wellbeing and healthy lifestyle behaviours all contribute to a child's ability to grow, learn and thrive. Evidence suggests that experiences during childhood can have lasting effects on health outcomes across the life course, highlighting the importance of early intervention and prevention. This poster explores the key factors that influence children's health and wellbeing and considers how families, schools, communities and public health policies can work together to promote positive outcomes.

Concepts

Health, wellbeing and lifestyle are distinct but interconnected concepts. Health refers to a child's physical, mental and social functioning (National Research Council and Institute of Medicine, 2004). Wellbeing describes a child's overall quality of life, including happiness, resilience and emotional security. Lifestyle refers to everyday behaviours and choices, such as nutrition, physical activity, sleep and screen time, that can positively or negatively influence health and wellbeing. Together, these concepts provide a holistic framework for understanding children's development and long term outcomes. Recognising the interaction between these concepts enables professionals to adopt evidence based, child centred approaches that promote health development across the life course.

What is health?

Health is a dynamic state of physical, mental and social wellbeing rather than merely the absence of disease. In children, good health supports normal growth, learning, emotional development and the ability to participate in everyday activities. It is influenced by a combination of biological, psychological, social and environmental factors, including nutrition, physical activity, family relationships and access to healthcare. Taking a holistic view of health recognises that these factors interact to shape both immediate wellbeing and long term outcomes throughout the life course.

What is wellbeing?

Wellbeing refers to a child's overall quality of life and their ability to thrive physically, emotionally, socially and mentally. It encompasses feelings of happiness, safety, resilience, self esteem and belonging, as well as the capacity to cope with everyday challenges. Statham and Chase (2010) argue that child wellbeing extends beyond physical health to include emotional, social and psychological functioning. Building on this, Bradshaw (2016) highlights that promoting wellbeing is essential for healthy development, positive mental health and improved long term outcomes. Similarly, Schoon *et al.*, (2013) emphasises that children's well-being is influenced by early life experiences, family relationships, education and wider socioeconomic conditions, highlighting the importance of adopting a holistic approach to supporting children.

Factors Influencing Children's Health, Wellbeing and Lifestyle

Children's health, wellbeing and lifestyle are influenced by a complex interaction of biological, social and environmental factors. Socioeconomic status, family relationships, education, housing, access to healthcare and community resources all play a significant role in shaping children's opportunities to develop healthy behaviours. Research has also shown that lifestyle behaviours such as physical activity, sleep quality and family engagement are associated with better physical and mental health outcomes, reinforcing the importance of supportive environments for children's development (Kim *et al.*, 2022). These wider determinants can create inequalities in health outcomes, highlighting the need for targeted public health interventions and supportive policies to ensure all children have the opportunity to thrive.

What is lifestyle?

Lifestyle refers to the everyday behaviours, habits and choices that influence a child's health and wellbeing. These include diet, physical activity, sleep, screen time, hygiene and social interactions. Griban *et al.*, (2023) argue that the development of healthy lifestyle behaviours in childhood is strongly influenced by the family, with parents playing a crucial role in modelling positive habits and motivating children to adopt healthier choices. Although children make personal choices, children's lifestyles are largely shaped by their family environment, school, culture and socioeconomic circumstances. Puia and Leucuta (2017) highlight that healthy nutritional and physical behaviours in childhood are associated with improved health outcomes, emphasising the importance of establishing positive habits early in life. Consequently, promoting healthy lifestyles requires support from families, educators and wider communities to reduce the risk of poor physical and mental health outcomes across the life course.

Promoting Health, Wellbeing and Lifestyle

Children's health, wellbeing and lifestyle are shaped by the environments in which they live, learn and grow. Families, schools, healthcare professionals and communities all play a vital role in supporting healthy development by promoting positive behaviours, providing emotional support and ensuring access to opportunities that enable children to thrive (Chapman *et al.*, 2023). A holistic approach that considers physical, mental and social wellbeing helps improve long term health outcomes and quality of life.

The Role of Public Health and Early Intervention

Early intervention helps identify and address health concerns before they become long term problems. Evidence suggests that early years interventions can improve Children's health and wellbeing by supporting positive development and reducing inequalities across the life course (Coles *et al.*, 2015). Public health initiatives such as vaccination programmes, healthy school meals, physical activity campaigns and parenting support can improve children's health and wellbeing. Collaboration between healthcare professionals, schools, families, and communities is essential to reduce health inequalities and give all children the opportunity to achieve positive lifelong outcomes. Investing in prevention during childhood can reduce the burden of disease and improve the quality of life.

Health inequalities in childhood

Health inequalities refer to the unfair and avoidable differences in health experienced by children from different socioeconomic backgrounds. Factors such as poverty, poor housing, limited access to healthcare and education, and food insecurity can negatively affect physical and mental wellbeing. Children living in disadvantaged communities are more likely to experience poorer health outcomes, highlighting the need for targeted public health interventions and policies to reduce these inequalities and promote equal opportunities for healthy development (Marmot, 2010).

Maslow's hierarchy of needs

Maslows hierarchy of needs suggests that children must have their basic physiological and safety needs met before they can achieve higher levels of wellbeing, such as developing positive relationships, self esteem and reaching their full potential. Access to adequate nutrition, safe housing, healthcare and emotional support provides the foundation for healthy growth and development. When these needs are unmet, children may experience poorer physical, emotional and educational outcomes. This theory highlights the importance of addressing children's fundamental needs through family support, education and public health initiatives to promote overall health and wellbeing (Maslow, 2012).

Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory

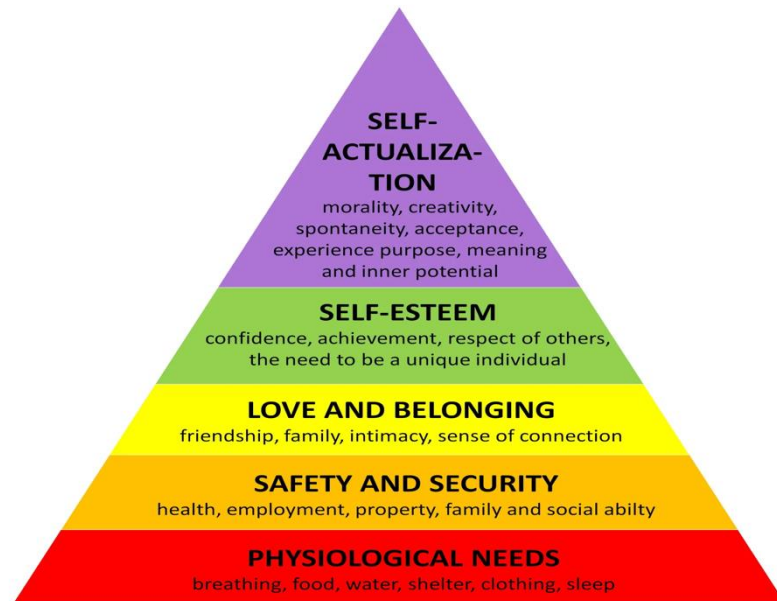
Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory suggests that a child's health and development are influenced by multiple environmental systems, including family, school, peers, community and wider society (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). Positive interactions within these systems can promote healthy development, while adverse environments may negatively affect wellbeing and lifestyle choices. The theory also emphasises that experiences in one environment can influence another. For example, supportive family relationships and positive school environments can encourage healthy behaviours, improve emotional wellbeing and reduce the risk of poor health outcomes (Tong & An, 2024).

The Role of Nutrition and Physical Activity

Nutrition and physical activity are fundamental to children's health, wellbeing and development (World Health Organisation, 2026). A balanced diet provides the energy and essential nutrients needed for growth, brain development and immune function, while regular physical activity supports healthy bones, muscles and cardiovascular fitness. Healthy eating and exercise also contribute to improved concentration, academic performance and emotional wellbeing. Conversely, poor nutrition and physical inactivity can increase the risk of childhood obesity, type 2 diabetes and mental health difficulties. Establishing healthy habits in early childhood is important because behaviours adopted during these years often continue into adulthood. Families, schools and public health organisations all play a key role in encouraging nutritious diets and active lifestyles, helping children achieve optimal health and reducing the risk of long term disease.

The role of sleep in children's health and wellbeing

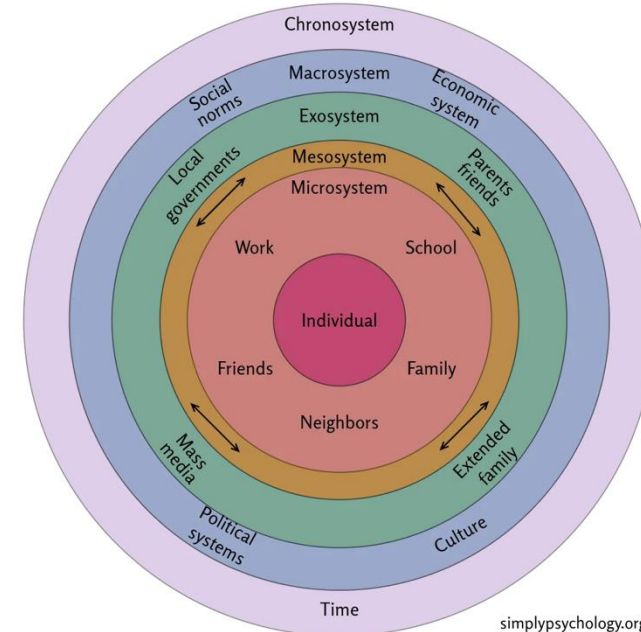
Sleep is essential for children's physical health, cognitive development and emotional wellbeing. During sleep, the body supports growth, strengthens the immune system and consolidates learning and memory. Inadequate sleep has been associated with poorer concentration, behavioural difficulties, reduced academic performance and an increased risk of obesity and mental health problem. Healthy sleep routines, including consistent bedtimes and limiting screen use before bed, can improve overall wellbeing and support healthy development. Parents, schools and healthcare professionals all have a role in promoting positive sleep habits (Bruni, 2010).



McLeod (2024).

Conclusion

Children's health, wellbeing and lifestyle are shaped by a complex interaction of biological, psychological, social and environmental factors. The evidence presented highlights the importance of meeting Children's basic needs, reducing health inequalities and promoting healthy behaviours through good nutrition, regular physical activity and adequate sleep. Theories such as Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs and Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory demonstrate how supportive environments and positive relationships contribute to healthy development. A collaborative approach involving families, schools, healthcare professionals and public health services is essential to ensure that all children have the opportunity to thrive and achieve positive lifelong health outcomes.



Guy-Evans (2025).

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