



The Shifting Definition of Wellness

Every recent generation has been influenced by the national conversation around pressing health issues. Generation X saw “your brain on drugs” and messaging from Mothers Against Drunk Driving. Millennials grew up with constant anti-smoking campaigns. Today’s youth are flooded with messages about reducing obesity, limiting sugar intake, and the idea that “sitting is the new smoking.” As a result, this generation has a different idea of wellness. They are keenly aware that what they put in their body impacts their ability to do everything.

Focus on physical activity may account for part of Gen Z’s affinity for the physical world. Nature has also been something of a prescription for the challenge of growing up in an increasingly digital world. With campaigns including former first lady Michelle Obama’s Get Moving initiative, Gen Z has grown up understanding the critical [need for outside play](#) to counter the evils of excessive screen time. As a result, market research continually indicates that protecting the environment is a core value for Gen Z.

Gen Z is not only thinking about their physical health. Even before the pandemic, they took a holistic view of wellness and emphasized mental health. A 2019 American Psychological Association [survey](#) found that 91% of GenZ adults reported experiencing at least one physical or emotional symptom because of stress, such as feeling depressed or sad (58%) or lacking interest, motivation or energy (55%). Results of the survey noted that this socially-conscious generation considers headline issues like immigration, sexual assault, and climate change to be significant sources of stress. This is a group that has been encouraged more than any other generation to seek support for mental health. Gen Z’s rates of depression and suicidal thoughts are [significantly higher](#) than other groups.

How COVID amplified wellness awareness

Given Gen Z’s health awareness, it is easy to imagine that the group would be overly sensitive to the health risks that come with COVID-19. While in some ways this is true, this age group has not historically carried as heavy a risk of severe illness due to COVID-19 as other age groups. This comparatively lower risk reinforced feelings of invincibility already typical to young people. It is a feeling that spurred thousands of college students to break social-distancing mandates for spring break in 2020 (and consequently contribute to [local spread](#) of the disease).