

WELLZoomers Are Embracing Our Industry

So Why Are They So Anxious?

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The **WELLSurvey™**, a new national probability study of U.S. adults' attitudes toward wellness and well-being, identified a growing segment of consumers who are deeply engaged in their pursuit of a balanced and fulfilling lifestyle. This cohort, between 21 and 35 years of age, is "WELLZoomers™." They are more likely than older age



The WELLSurvey, co-authored by Civano Advisory Services' CEO Kevin Kelly and MMGY Global co-founder Dr. Peter Yesawich, explores the health and wellness attitudes, behaviors and intentions of U.S. consumers. Based on insights from 1,002 participants, the independent research study offers actionable strategies for engaging market segments and highlights how consumers perceive *wellness* as practical and measurable, while viewing *well-being* as aspirational and emotional. Here, the authors, joined by researcher Dr. Tegan Reeves, further analyze study findings relative to the spa industry.

groups to live in an urban environment, be single, track their health metrics with wearables, embrace spa and wellness products and measure their well-being emotionally. However, **42 percent are significantly more likely to feel anxious, and 39 percent feel more stressed out.** While WELLZoomers are generally optimistic, several of their key drivers and behaviors are concerning:

- Take medication (35%)
- Regularly use recreational marijuana (41%)
- Feel overwhelmed by responsibilities (33%)

- Have trouble concentrating (32%)
- Use recreational drug(s) to calm down after work (23%)
- Consume alcohol to calm down after work (20%)

We posit there are a few external forces—social media platforms, information technology and fragmented healthcare—contributing to their palpable anxiety. Fortunately, **78 percent of WELLZoomers regularly use spa services, alternative medical practices or healing therapies**—the highest concentration among all age cohorts in the survey. Therefore, the spa and wellness industry is uniquely poised to address this emerging malaise by using scientific and experiential outcomes to help WELLZoomers manage their stress effectively.

Feelings of anxiety are emotional signals that, when combined with physiological responses, encourage action. Furthermore, the nervous system that regulates these signals may be strengthened and made more agile. Armed with this understanding, wellness providers are empowered to help WELLZoomers, indeed all consumers, achieve and enjoy a healthy lifestyle of well-being.

Information and Healthcare Factors

Advancements in information dissemination and healthcare have yielded immense benefits for adults interested in pursuing healthier lifestyles but with some unintended consequences. Specifically, the tsunami of information now available through technology, combined with a fragmented approach to healthcare delivery, has coalesced to elevate the anxiety of WELLZoomers. They are inundated with a constant stream of stimuli that fuels increased anxiety. In his book, *Thank You for Being Late*, Tom Friedman references MIT professor Dr. Sherry Turkle's hypothesis that the younger generation who grew up in the digital age and are more adept at the use of emerging technology face stressful pressures to stay up to date and be connected, and are inundated with information and imagery. They, therefore, need to manage the psychological effects of being constantly plugged in. Image-based social media

platforms amplify this dynamic as fear from cyberbullying reaches record highs. Furthermore, information on these platforms has become a stew of facts, opinions and half-truths designed to grab attention and drive clicks, leading to a vicious cycle of consumers *feeling* anxious about *being* anxious.

Our reaction to stress is often manifest through the bi-directional sympathetic (“fight or flight”) and parasympathetic (“rest and digest”) nervous systems, interconnected mind-body functions that direct our reactions to both danger and safety. Yet, despite discourse around the benefits of integrative healthcare, the prevailing healthcare system often treats the physical, mental and emotional aspects of health separately. While anxiety affects every aspect of health, diagnostic and treatment silos make it challenging to treat the whole person.

Medical doctors focus on anatomy and physiology; psychiatrists on brain chemistry and emotions; and psychologists on perceptions and behaviors. Fragmented assessment facilitates treatment viewed through the narrow lens of the specialist who provides it and oftentimes leads to an overemphasis on prescription medication rather than addressing the root causes of anxiety. Medication, of course, can be an important component of mental health and should be considered with medical oversight. However, an integrated and complementary approach can promote healthier ways to understand and manage anxiety, including the development of coping mechanisms that build and maintain resiliency. The spa and wellness industry’s program machinery and relation-

ship with its customers can provide this whole-person approach, delivered in an emotionally safe, welcoming environment. It can create programs and deliver services that demystify anxiety and empower people to utilize evidence-based tools and techniques to manage stressors.

Not every news story, smartphone ping or work demand yields a crisis. While raising awareness about anxiety and mental health issues is crucial, increased awareness may exacerbate dysregulation if not properly contextualized. For example, stress is often associated with negative outcomes yet can be beneficial when it is a driving force for action that reduces it. In workplace studies, younger employees often report feeling stressed by excessive work pressures that can lead to anxiety attacks and burnout. Learning to become agile in such situations can drive better performance while simultaneously reducing the debilitating impact of stress. By recontextualizing stress we can reduce its negative impact, increase resilience and enjoy a better quality of life.

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The Nervous System as a Part of the Solution

The body is constantly working to balance its internal and external stressors. We now have access to wearable devices that can alert us to some of these signals so that we can adapt, but we also need to understand the process.

Heart rate is a biomarker that can help contextualize anxiety, as it spikes during stress exposure. Techniques like breathwork and meditation can lower heart rate. The variability of one’s heart rate (HRV) can indicate how efficiently one shifts between states of stress, a sign of resilience. Using wearables like smartwatches and fitness trackers, individuals can track their HRV and gain insight into anxiety. Such insight can be enhanced by understanding factors that control it. Since WELLZoomers have the highest incidence of using wearables to track health metrics (86 percent), the wellness industry should consider integrating them and other markers into programs.



The interaction between heart rate and stress is guided by the process in which the body communicates information from and to the cardiovascular system. This is called **allostasis**—the body’s adaptive response to stress. Along with respiratory, endocrine, immune, digestive and sensory systems, the cardiovascular system both receives and gives information through allostasis. When we feel stress, our heart rate goes up. Conversely, when we lower our heart rate, we feel less stress.

Allostasis communicates through systems to designate resources, such as hormones, increased heart rate, redirection of blood flow and release of cortisol in handling the stressor confronting us. This process reacts to internal and external environments—situations actual or perceived. That is why we experience worry and excitement in the same way physiologically.

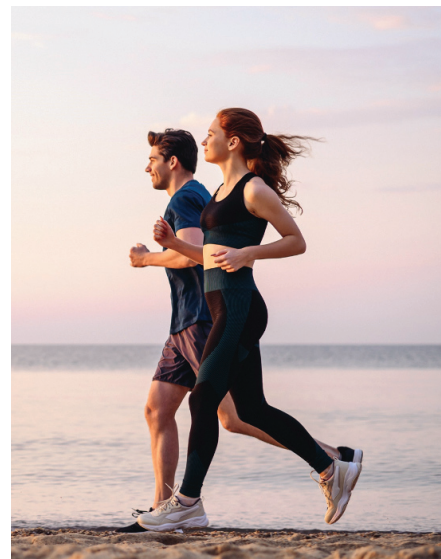
A popular explanation of this process—and tools and apps now found on websites—is the body’s sympathetic and parasympathetic response through the vagus nerve and the lens of polyvagal theory. This theory makes it easy for consumers to understand the mind and body connection as we respond to stress, but the science is incomplete and has been refuted in some academic circles. Regardless, it suggests people are looking for tools to address stress through an integrated approach.

Empowering People Through Allogility™

Spa and wellness professionals can help WELLZoomers understand their feelings, such as anxiety, and address them in a rational and effective manner. The process by which our body balances stress can be strengthened and made more flexible. The authors refer to allostasis’s agility using the portmanteau **allogility™**.

Susan David, Ph.D., a Harvard Medical School psychologist, explains the power of flexible attunement to our feelings in her book *Emotional Agility*. Many in the mental and physical health communities assert that experiential learning can change individuals’ relationship with stressors and build resiliency. Counselors talk about expanding the window of tolerance between the sympathetic and parasympathetic nervous systems. Similarly, psychologists now have a deeper understanding of neuro and biofeedback, and scientists link sleep and nutrition to resiliency. We can now engage in more practices that make us more agile and healthy.

Hence, **allogility**—as defined—is the ability of body and mind systems to recognize and use stressors effectively to enhance one’s well-being. Just as resilience often refers to enduring hardship, we assert that **allogility** reflects the ability to *flexibly adapt to stress*.



The spa and wellness community can integrate programs designed to foster allogility. Opportunities to explore influencing stress-modulation abound. Activities to improve allogility include breathing practices, yoga, meditation, sleep hygiene, gratitude, exercise, biofeedback, talk therapy, forest bathing, relationships, nutrition and diet, and regenerative programs, among others. Biomarkers that may be used to understand signals include HRV, lipid panels, glucose monitors, hormonal testing, cortisol testing and emotion/stress tracking. Comprehensive packaging of both activities and biomarkers will enable WELLZoomers to understand their anxiety and explore activities that help them adapt to it.

Conclusion

WELLZoomers represent the market segment that will shape the future size, composition and growth of the spa and wellness industry. They are more technologically sophisticated and connected, optimistic and empathetic, culturally and racially diverse, and have a more active sex life than any other age cohort. But the WELLSurvey revealed they are more likely to feel overwhelmed and ruminate. Allogility is a construct the spa and wellness community can adopt to frame the interconnectivity of emotional and physiological systems that link biomarkers and experiences to influence their well-being.

Information overload and healthcare fragmentation have coalesced to elevate WELLZoomers' anxiety. Through integrated programming, good science and reframing the subject with allogility, spa leaders can empower consumers to leverage the benefits of stress and learn to "surf-through" stressful moments. The spa and wellness industry play an essential role in developing allogility "tools," thereby enabling guests, WELLZoomers included, to build healthier, happier and more agile lives. ■



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Actionable Intelligence

5 Ways to Support WELLZoomers' Well-Being

The spa industry is a natural fit for WELLZoomers in their pursuit of well-being. Analysis of the WELLSurvey inspires a few key takeaways for spa owners and directors and their teams to engage this rising demographic:

- 1 Integrate wearables and biometrics:** Offer services incorporating heart rate variability (HRV) and stress tracking. Use these and other data insights to tailor services and demonstrate measurable well-being outcomes.
- 2 Develop stress management tools:** Introduce services focused on breathwork and meditation. Highlight these and other stress-reducing practices as solutions for the anxieties that characterize the WELLZoomers generation.
- 3 Promote "allogility" programs:** Create services to help spa guests understand their ability to adapt to stress holistically—combining mind-body activities and emotional tools with evidence-based science.
- 4 Reframe stress:** Educate guests about the benefits of stress when properly managed, presenting it as an opportunity for growth.
- 5 Use social media to educate:** To offer practical ways to navigate information overload, share wellness tips and promote self-care routines on spa social media profiles.

