



**MICHIGAN MEDICINE**  
UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

**MICHIGAN ALZHEIMER'S  
DISEASE CENTER**

**MAY 2020**

## Monthly Wellness Update

The Wellness Initiative is a program of the Michigan Alzheimer's Disease Center at the University of Michigan. This initiative supports family caregivers of adults living with memory loss through providing innovative wellness programs emphasizing stress resilience to ensure continued health and well-being on the caregiving journey.



*I think what we're seeing actually is not compassion fatigue, but empathic distress, where there's a resonance, and yet we can't do anything about it. When we are more stabilized, then we can face the world with more buoyancy, more capacity to address these very profound social and environmental issues. So that's why I call these things 'edge states,' because they really call us to our edge.*

— Roshi Joan Halifax, 2017 interview, [OnBeing](#)

Most days, sometimes twice a day, I visit a hill on the far side of my neighborhood. As a comforting touchstone, I run up this hill to document the changes, in nature and in myself. Some days I feel heavy and slow, other days I take the challenge feeling invigorated and strong. Overall, I'm simply grateful I can visit and climb this hill. Since the *Stay Home, Stay Safe* order in March, there has been variable weather on this hill. There has also been variable weather inside my mind and my body as well. Stormy, sunny, snowy... this is a shared experience. We are all coping with uncertainty and grieving in ways we have never encountered before. This is a shared phenomenon like no other in our lifetime and it includes profound fatigue, empathic distress as well as a kind of loss most of us do not have experience with: ambiguous loss. Care partners, on the other hand, are intimately familiar with ambiguous loss — the kind without answers, without certain closure or clear understanding. Collectively we are sharing so many ambiguous losses, our hearts are breaking together and our hearts are also expanding together. Navigating these seemingly disparate experiences, from the contractions of fear and grief to the expansive feelings of gratitude and compassion, we may discover how inextricably linked they truly are in our lives, one deepening the other. And, we are also encountering the accompanying fatigue in traversing these two states on a daily, hourly or momentary basis. **We are meeting our shared and personal edges, and it is here at our edge where we may struggle to locate and sustain our sense of balance and stability. It's disorienting and frequently disheartening.**

So, how do we stabilize ourselves and cultivate more buoyancy? Much like springtime has fought to take hold and remain steady, nature's struggle seems to mirror our own. Taking a lesson from nature's cycles

and from “my” hill, I am reminded of four practices to acknowledge and hold a difficult moment: to **soften**, **savor**, **secure** & **surrender**. These four words, as direction toward a compassionate practice, can help us meet a difficult or painful moment, to stay present and allow things to be as they are without additional distress or pushing difficulty away. That said, it’s important to feel and express the discomfort first. There must first be space to be mad as hell or cry for any reason at all, to feel hurt or sad. Adding in a good gripe or complaint, rant, or tears for ourselves and for all of humanity is not only cathartic, it’s one of the most reasonable and sane responses to what is actually happening around us. Then, and only then, the practice and intention to **soften** around the discomfort, to **savor** what is good, to **secure** ourselves in what is stable and what we can control, and to **surrender** or let go of what we cannot, may be possible. Our heart can be full of gratitude AND we can also complain and struggle. This is about meeting our edge and then, one step at a time, meeting our sense of helplessness and hopelessness with compassion, rather than with judgement or comparison.

In my conversations with family, friends and caregivers over the past two months, I can’t help but notice how we are all being careful to qualify our concerns, complaints and context. I have noticed close to heroic efforts to not only comply with shelter-in-place orders, but to consistently apologize for a complaint or for grief which may not seem as profound or important as another’s. **We must give ourselves and each other a break, dropping this apologetic fight with ourselves and our feelings on a daily basis.** Our individual expression differences aside, most of us are not used to this kind of grief and some of us (raising my own hand) are very quick in our determination to move through its five stages to arrive at finding meaning from and through our discomfort and sadness. While finding meaning is wonderful and can give us purpose and heal our aching hearts, it’s not a race and this is not a time for competing with ourselves or our expectations. Arrived at too soon, our unattended grief can become like the tension and snap of a rubber-band stretched and released, and we may find ourselves right-smack-back in or stuck in a process we avoided in haste. (As a reminder, the stages of grief are: denial, anger, bargaining, depression, acceptance, meaning).

Among the above mentioned and cyclical stages of grieving and coping with ambiguous loss, where do you feel you are right now?

What might you need, that is possible to access, to support your heart and to feel more stable and held in this moment? Whatever that is, I hope you will say this out loud to yourself and hold it closely and gently.

Wherever you are in this moment, what would it feel like to just pause— to S.T.O.P. (Stop, Take a breath, Open, and Proceed), then soften, savor, secure and/or surrender?

I hope you will join us on Monday for the next Catching Your Breath where we will meet online, just as we are, with our grief and our gripes, with hope and with humor. Please be sure to register to receive the virtual link to join the meeting. Participation is free, registration is required.

In gratitude,

—Laura Rice-Oeschger, LMSW



## Upcoming Programs

Please register online, or call 734-615-8293 to reserve your place.



### **VIRTUAL: Catching Your Breath**

A monthly well-being and mindfulness program for family caregivers of adults living with memory loss. The program varies each month and newcomers are always welcome.

Monday, May 11 at 10:00 - 11:30am

**Registration required by Friday, May 8. We will send you the virtual call details upon registration.**

## Call for Caregiver Stories

For Caregivers who knew about  
social isolation long before  
COVID-19



and are helping their family & friends  
through this crisis

Lana O.

The COVID-19 quarantine has brought about a unique set of circumstances for everyone. But caregivers may already feel comfort in knowing that they've developed resiliency for social isolation before. You may be feeling especially isolated during this time, using your mindfulness and resiliency skills to a greater extent than normal. Or, you may be feeling like a resource to your family and friends, helping them through this unfamiliar environment.

Either way, **we know that your role in quarantine is a unique one, and we'd love to hear from you.** Do you have a story during your time in quarantine that has been particularly joyful or challenging with your partner? Have you developed a particular routine or management style that serves you well? Are you doing specific activities that bring you and/or your partner joy? **Any story that has resonated with you from quarantine - we'd love to hear about!**

Please send Erin Fox, Center Communications Specialist, an email at [eefox@med.umich.edu](mailto:eefox@med.umich.edu) with your story and a photo or two. We hope to bring your caregiver experience to light (with your permission of course! You can certainly share your story with us, without wanting it to be made public). If you have questions about this, before sharing your story, please also contact Erin. We hope to hear from you!

Submit your story

## Resources for you during COVID-19

In order to assist in keeping you well during this uncertain time, our Wellness Initiative Lead, Laura Rice-Oeschger, LMSW has compiled a page of resources on our website [here](#). We hope it will serve helpful to you during the COVID-19 pandemic.



### Resource Highlight

#### Headspace Meditations for Michigan Residents

Now more than ever, it's important to take care of ourselves and one another while each of us stays home and stays safe. Governor Whitmer and Headspace, a popular mindfulness meditation app, are offering a special collection of meditation, sleep, and movement exercises designed to help you keep a strong and healthy mind in the midst of this global health crisis.

Click [here](#) to access the resource.

Full list of resources available here

## Family Perspectives on Long-term Care Study Looking for Participants

Do you have a family member in a long-term care facility? Dr. Donovan Maust and his team at Michigan Medicine's Department of Psychiatry are interested in learning more about the experience of having a family member reside in a long-term care facility and getting ideas on how to enhance the care environment for both residents and employees. Participants are asked to participate in a 1-hour

confidential phone call, and will receive a \$50 e-gift card as a thank you for their time. Interested individuals are asked to fill out the brief form below. Contact Molly Turnwald at [turnwald@umich.edu](mailto:turnwald@umich.edu) or 734-845-5773 with any questions. More information is available in the study flyer [here](#).

Complete the survey

## Have a Seat. *Practicing alone, together.* with Laura Rice-Oeschger, LMSW



Each Thursday, beginning at 12:00PM EST, you are invited to join with others for 30 minutes of live, online, guided mindfulness practice.

During these times of physical isolation and distancing, it has been encouraging and reassuring to see familiar faces on the screen. In our Wellness programs, we have been relieved to learn how connecting and supportive group meditation has been during this challenging time. In support of our individual and collective need for calm, supportive, and sustaining practices, I will be guiding a weekly drop-in “sit.”

These sessions are intended for our Center's community— for family caregivers and for professionals who work with and serve caregivers and adults with dementia. **Each “sit” is appropriate for anyone interested in developing and/or sustaining a mindfulness meditation practice.** Family members at home are welcome to participate too.

At this time, no registration is necessary.

The link for the session will be shared via email and internally with all Mindfulness-based Dementia Care (MBDC) participants, MBDC graduates, our Wellness program members, and Center colleagues.

**With the exception of the facilitator, microphones will be muted during each session until the very end. Video is optional.**

**The chat feature is available to communicate for technology support, should you encounter any difficulty with connection.**

### What do you need?

- You & the ability to log into Zoom via phone, tablet, or computer
- A comfortable seat — chair, couch, bed...
- A blanket if you want to be extra cozy
- A cushion or support for your back (sitting against a wall is helpful)
- Headphones are recommended if your environment has background noise

We hope to see you there. If you have any questions, or would like additional information, please contact Laura at [lalice@med.umich.edu](mailto:lalice@med.umich.edu).

We See  
You ♥

## Keep an eye out for caregiver content on our Facebook

We know that caregivers are going through some unique challenges due to COVID-19. As a result, we've crafted some social media content specific to the caregiver experience. We will be posting these illustrations, created by Laura's daughter, Lana Oeschger, over the coming weeks. If you don't currently follow us on [Facebook](#), now might be a great time to do so! You can find us [here](#).

Follow us on Facebook

SUPPORT THE CENTER

VISIT OUR WEBSITE



MICHIGAN MEDICINE  
UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

MICHIGAN ALZHEIMER'S  
DISEASE CENTER

