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.

OCTOBER 2020

Monthly Wellness Update

“There is change that takes you far away from yourself, and then there is change that brings you home. Be aware of which you invite in and allow.”

~Vienna Pharon

Where we stand, how we define ourselves and our values is at the forefront of our daily lives more than ever as we near this historic event - a presidential election during a global pandemic. Political views aside, we can agree it’s a time of scrutiny, judgement, opinions, and tensions. Moving through campaigns as a nation every four years is draining and stands in stark contrast to the striking and inspiring beauty of the season in which this all unfolds. How does your awareness of the outer landscape of American politics level up with the inner politics of your daily life? Take a moment to check in with yourself now. What words would you choose to describe how you are personally feeling about entering the next 30 days? It may be safe to assume that most of us are having difficulty keeping the news outside the boundaries of our sense of peace and wellbeing. These edges may feel blurry as we near November, leaving our nerves feeling frayed and our minds fuzzy as we try to keep up. You may feel as if you are bracing yourself in the meantime and this is, of course, not a comfortable way to live. An election season is fought with human behaviors most of us would not tolerate in our personal relationships.

As caregivers, the idea of bracing yourself for change, for fallout or disappointing news is all too familiar. It can be hard to enjoy much when the operating system is running on projections and preparations, much like tracing the path of a hurricane. Would it surprise you to learn how this year has already seen the 2nd greatest number of storms in the Atlantic in recorded history? In any other year, this would likely standout in the news cycle. As 2020 rounds its final quarter, how many more surprises can we weather?

As we have gathered online in the Catching Your Breath (CYB) program over the past seven months, we
have explored the personal experiences of adapting to the pandemic, to new caregiving conditions, mustering strength to meet new changes while fortifying resilience with intention and compassion. All the while acknowledging and sharing stories of profound grief, the complexity of losses alongside everyday triumphs and gratitudes for friendship, family, and stability (even pleasure) where it can be found, celebrated, and savored.

Now is the time, critical in fact, to commit and chart a course of preparation to source our days with what we need to feel stable and supported. Concretely & practically creating a personalized pathway for self-care in the context of community, while designing and privately integrating learnings in alignment with our individual needs, and doing so daily.

So much is at stake this season, including our health. It is well understood how easy it is to set aside our care during stressful times. In the wake of so much external disruption, we need plans to disrupt our own unhelpful habits which steer us away from the helpful ones we know will keep us safe, stable, and sane.

What is possible to emphasize and harness for your wellbeing today?

- From the smallest, least time consuming pleasure to extended time for renewal, what can you schedule for yourself right now?
- What do you know or sense will be essential practices for maintaining clarity and calm?
- Who in your life can provide a grounding, helpful, humorous, and kind anchor when you need renewal, reassurance, and relief?
- How do you plan to be there for yourself in the same loving way you meet the needs of others?

May the answers to these questions help to spark a deliberate and sincere call to action on your own behalf. There's no debating the importance of your wellbeing.

In gratitude,

—Laura Rice-Oeschger, LMSW

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Catching Your Breath

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

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, October 12 at 10:00 - 11:30AM

Registration required by Friday, October 9. We will send you the virtual call details upon registration.

Register here

New support group for those living with MCI or early-stage dementia beginning this month

We are excited to announce a new support group launching in October. Mitten Minds Support Group is available specifically for individuals with mild cognitive impairment or early-stage dementia. The group will meet monthly on the third Tuesday of the month from 3:00-4:00pm, and newcomers are welcome at
Registration is required for each session to receive the virtual log-in information.

For more information, or to register please visit the link below.

Perceptions of Family Caregivers of Older Adults with Dementia Regarding Behavioral and Psychological Symptoms of Dementia, and the Impact of COVID-19

Exploring the experiences of caregivers of people with dementia regarding challenging symptoms of dementia, how they manage these symptoms in the home, and how their experiences have changed during the COVID-19 pandemic. This study is seeking family caregivers living with older adults with dementia to participate in individual interviews. Contact Melissa Harris at mharris@umich.edu or 405-513-1271. This study will meet with participants virtually or by telephone.

WeCareAdvisor: A Web-Based Tool to Improve Quality of Life for Military Veterans with Dementia and their Caregivers (WeCareAdvisor):

This study is seeking caregivers to test the WeCareAdvisor, a web-based tool that aims to help users learn more about and manage behavioral and psychological symptoms of dementia like wandering, repeated questioning, anger, depression or apathy. This study is looking for participants who have access to a computer or mobile device with internet and are also the primary in-home caregivers for a military Veteran who is living with dementia. This study does not require any in-person visits; it will be completely virtual. Contact Barbara Stanislawski at bstanisl@med.umich.edu or 734-232-0323.

Soothing word of the month
Jijivisha (gg-vee-shaa)
Jijivisha is a Hindi word whose rough translation means indomitable spirit. The word means the strong, eternal desire to live and continue living. It is used to describe a person who loves life even through all that life throws their way.

*Please pause here and take a few slow, intentional breaths. If possible, close your eyes and allow this brief rest in the moment*

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

Thursdays, 12:00 - 12:30PM
Virtually via Zoom

We are happy to announce our new weekly Have a Seat mindfulness meditation program taking place Thursdays at noon. To participate in this program, all you need is a computer to join via the web link or a phone to listen to the guided meditation. More information is available on our website [here]. Would you like to receive weekly reminders for the program? If so, subscribe below.

Subscribe to receive weekly reminders

Upcoming Virtual Programs

Expert Panel: "What Advancements in Blood Biomarker Research Could Mean for the Future of Alzheimer's Disease"

October 28, 11:00AM - Noon

Research presented at the Alzheimer's Association International Conference this past July show promising results for a blood test that may detect Alzheimer's disease before symptoms appear. To share what this could mean for the future of Alzheimer's disease testing, our Center Director, Dr. Henry Paulson, and Dr. Nicholas Kanaan, Associate Professor of Translational Neuroscience at Michigan State University will come together to answer some key questions. The program will be facilitated by Dr. Scott Roberts, Associate Professor of Health Behavior and Health Education at the U-M School of Public Health.

Register here for the October lecture

"When it's not Alzheimer's Disease"

November 20, 11:00AM - Noon

Dr. Sami Barmada will present specifically about the many dementias outside of Alzheimer's disease. Dr. Barmada is an Associate Professor of Neurology at the University of Michigan. His research focused on the overlap between frontotemporal dementia (FTD) and ALS.