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.

DECEMBER 2020

Monthly Wellness Update

Hope is being able to see that there is light despite all of the darkness.
– Desmond Tutu

This season is bittersweet. December is a difficult month for so many, even prior to the stressors of a pandemic. For those not visited by deep sorrow, or the overlay of difficult memories, this month presents new challenges. We know what we know about ourselves, and this year, it is heavier. Even the natural and diminishing cycle of daylight feels more personal and depleting. Collectively, we are facing more darkness within and around ourselves, and doing our best to secure new or at least some comforting ways to meet it. Thankfully, the presence of lights are central to the rituals of this season and help lead us through the darkest days of the calendar year. Be they cheerful with color or more somber in their glow, the brightness of electric lights or the slow, flickering warmth of a fire or candles, there is something here for all preferences and observances.

Light creates an opening where there would otherwise be darkness, illuminating personal experiences which are hard to describe, while acknowledging a depth understood by all. Light brings us closer to the aspects of ourselves which long for warmth and invite forth the opportunity to reflect and connect with what lives inside of us and leans outward toward the comfort, beauty and hopefulness we seek. There is no way around this darkness, only through. And though we are separated from people we love in ways we would not have imagined this time last year, we are discovering it is possible. Adjusting traditions and our own expectations, we are discovering that we can do it and we may also be learning new ways which actually work quite well. And something I have learned from family caregivers this year, how unexpected and temporary solutions offer some invaluable insights toward our own care. We may understand ourselves even better and feel more in touch with what we need and who we love right now. We may also be locating creative alternatives which provide us with surprising relief. We will find out soon enough how we are changed. For now, may we simply find enough. As we lower our expectations and release what is not necessary, we can raise our lights to see what is here to provide comfort and joy.
What is more important to you this year than in years past and how is this shaping the way you enjoy or tolerate this season and any holidays you celebrate?

What warms you and serves as a light in these darker days? Has there been anything or anyone unexpected or surprising this season?

If you could create your own ritual, just for you, to illuminate something you want to be sure to acknowledge, remember and carry forth into the new year, what would it be and what might you do?

I hope you will create a ritual just for yourself. And I hope it will support you as you find gentle ways to move yourself and anyone in your care through the difficulties of this season.

Alongside any darkness you experience, I wish you quiet moments of calm connection and resplendent peace.

In gratitude,

—Laura Rice-Oeschger, LMSW

Join us for the next 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 welcome anytime.

Monday, December 14
10:00 - 11:30AM

Registration is required here by Friday, December 11. We will send the virtual call details to those registered.

Visit our website

Living Grief Program Coming in January
The Wellness Initiative will begin a themed exploration of grief from January - June 2021. Following the insights in the newly released book, “Opening to Grief: Finding Your Way from Loss to Peace” by Claire Willis and Marnie Crawford Samuelson, we will explore the reflections and pilot the ways which work best for you. This may include additional round-table or smaller monthly gatherings for those of you who wish to discuss your experiences & questions in groups with similar circumstances. The group is ideal for all caregivers, including caregivers who have lost a partner or parent this year. It is recommended that participants have previously participated in a Wellness Initiative program, though this is not required. Any questions about the program can be directed to the program facilitator, Laura Rice-Oeschger, LMSW at lerice@med.umich.edu. Registration is required here or below. When registering, click the Caregiver Wellness Program Registration tab and register specifically for the Living Grief program within the form.


The program will take place on the first Monday of each month from 10:00 - 11:30AM, January - June 2021. Dates below:

- January 4
- February 1
- March 1
- April 5
- May 3
- June 7

Did you miss the Women & Brain Health presentation last week? A recording is available

Wellness Initiative Lead, Laura Rice-Oeschger, LMSW presented at an event, "Women & Brain Health," with AARP on December 3. She was joined by Sarah Lock, AARP Senior Vice President and Executive Director of the Global Council on Brain Health and Neuroscientist, Lisa Mosconi, PhD, author of the groundbreaking book The XX Brain. If you missed the presentation and would like to view, a recording is available at the link below.

View the video here

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

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 any time.

Registration is required for each session to receive the virtual log-in information.

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

Register for Mitten Minds here

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

Soothing words of the month
Mangata (Swedish)
The road-like reflection of the moon on the water.

Kawaakari (Japanese)
The glow of a river or stream in darkness. Or the reflection of moonlight off flowing water.

Upcoming Virtual Programs

Calm Connections - Caregiving and Living in the Moment
Presented by Laura Rice-Oeschger, LMSW of the Center's Wellness Initiative
January 27, 2021
10:00 - 11:30AM
Registration is required [here](#).

Dementia, Health, and the Black Family Caregiver: Towards a Novel Intervention
Presented by Dr. Sheria Robinson-Lane of the University of Michigan School of Nursing
February 23, 2021
2:00 - 3:30PM
Registration is required [here](#).

Successful Aging Through Financial Empowerment (SAFE)
Presented by Latoya Hall of the Wayne State University Institute of Gerontology
March 23, 2021
12:00 - 1:30PM
Registration is required [here](#).

New Research Studies Looking for Caregivers

Exploring the Use of Weighted Blankets as a Non-
Pharmacologic Intervention for Home Dwelling Older Adults with Dementia

We are delighted to support Melissa Harris, a PhD student at the University of Michigan School of Nursing, in a new research study. Ms. Harris is seeking participants living with dementia, that live together with their family caregiver in the home setting, to complete a research study about the use of weighted blankets.

Research shows that the use of weighted blankets can reduce anxiety and stress in older adults, however there isn’t research specifically targeting older adults with dementia. Ms. Harris hopes to explore the use of weighted blankets in older adults living with dementia to see if they may be helpful in increasing the user’s relaxation and decrease stress, which might in turn help reduce some of the challenging symptoms of dementia individuals experience.

For more information, please follow the link below to see the full study overview flyer, or contact Melissa Harris at mharris1@umich.edu or 405-513-1271.

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.

Learn more about caregiver research