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.

JANUARY 2021

Monthly Wellness Update

For last year’s words belong to last year’s language.
And next year’s words await another voice.
And to make an end is to make a beginning.
~T.S. Eliot~
(from Little Gidding)

2021. You may have traversed the unimaginable and managed the unmanageable to get here. The past year has meant significant changes for the majority and has been catastrophic for far too many. We know this, we have lived it, observed and witnessed it and it’s been painful. We are ready to move on, individually and collectively, to move past this pain, and rather quickly it seems. And yet, it would be a significant mistake to turn away completely, to toss 2020 in the bin (the dumpster fire as it’s been called) and to never look back. While we won’t stay or even visit 2020 ever again, we can thoughtfully pick-pocket this thief of a year, in the very least to harvest some good in our lives. How about lifting some of these... the kindness, the humor, the community, the renewed hope, the clarifying hardships which shaped new boundaries and commitments, the feeling into our strengths and discoveries about how our lives work and how our minds and hearts function best. Take it or leave it, we each have the opportunity to walk forward with some deep learning. These valuable, hard won insights and experiences seem worth holding on to, like seeds for a different way of living and being in our lives in 2021.

What seeds do you have that you’d like to plant and protect?

As adults, we have opportunities to begin again, and yet, we rarely do. Or we may begin and shut down soon after. Not due to any personal flaws, rather because it is exceptionally hard to change and to do things differently. The world pushes back when we move against the grain of our lives and as we strive to nurture the conditions for new growth to take root. It disrupts our routines to break ground and can also, paradoxically, upset the people closest to us (our biggest fans), even when we are making the best choice for ourselves. Not to mention how terribly inconvenient this can be in the very best of times.

Sound familiar yet?
2020 set the world on fire. Change sets our lives on fire. It's supposed to, and it's also scary. This year, we walked through fire and if we are lucky, we have been given the fertilizer we need to grow, to handle flames for a controlled burn for stimulating fresh soil and growing more intentionally in the ways we truly hope to grow. In order to grow new things, we need different seeds. And this requires doing another scary thing: Grieving. Grieving fosters healing and, as caregivers know, there is no getting around grieving. It will find a way through, sometimes in destructive ways, if we do not learn how to walk alongside our grief with more compassion. Grieving well is essential for living well, and culturally we don’t do this very well. Even perceived positive changes can entail grieving losses and changes we struggle to understand. Perhaps now, post-2020, we are on a path toward including more grieving in our living.

In a year full of disagreements, can we agree to forget the resolutions and the self-improvement? What would it be like to be additive vs. reductive at the top of year? To have resolve vs. resolutions? To allow what has happened to us and the work we need to do to grieve and heal to be enough. And, one my favorite words... and. Enough and more of what we already have. This is something else I have learned from caregivers: we can do this hard work while embracing our hope for more... more change, more peace, more kindness, more space, more clarity, more connection, more joy. At a time when so many are going without, wanting more could be misunderstood as obtuse or self-absorbed, but it is essential. Kindness, inclusivity and resilience depend on it and our world, our lives, are in desperate need of all three. We are in desperate need of more because right now, at this time in history, we all need more than anyone can give us. Together, we will heal.

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, January 11
10:00 - 11:30AM

Registration is required here by Friday, January 8. We will send the virtual call details to those registered.

Register for Catching Your Breath here

New Year Virtual Meditation Retreat:
8 Days of Meditation on the 8's

Jan 8, 2021 at 8:00AM - Jan 15, 2021 at 8:00PM

Join us from the comfort of your home for a lightly facilitated mindful meditation each morning and night for 30 minutes. This retreat is suitable for beginners and those with previous meditation experience. This retreat is free of charge, but donations are encouraged. Donations will be used for the Arbor Center for Mindfulness scholarships.

Schedule:
This 8-day class meets daily Friday, January 8 through Friday, January 15 at 8 am and 8 pm. The class is facilitated by Ann Arbor Center for Mindfulness teachers.

Registrants will receive a zoom link the week of the event.
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

Pilrigatigiinniq (inuit)
Working together for the common good, community spirit

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.
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 mharrisl@umich.edu or 405-513-1271.

More information here

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.