



MICHIGAN MEDICINE
UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

**MICHIGAN ALZHEIMER'S
DISEASE CENTER**

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.

MAY 2021

Monthly Wellness Update



"When people say they want to go back to 'normal,' that's partially a grief manifestation. We're reflecting on what we've been through and are continuing to go through, and we want to get out of it and go back to what is common, familiar, secure, and stable." – Dr. Jennifer Ashton

What feels common, familiar, secure and stable in your environment right now?

What - within yourself - feels familiar, secure and stable?

What, if anything, do you want to "get out of?"

Do you recognize grieving as part of your experience?

When we contemplate where we are today, in our lives and within ourselves, we may find it challenging on a daily basis to integrate our inner and outer experiences. To add insult to injury, we may interpret this as a problem when, in fact, it's normal. Our mental health rests on our ability to tolerate stress and conflict, change and uncertainty, while safely navigating a reliable return to some stability. Like stepping stones through a raging river, we can place our steps with greater confidence when we are able to see and trust where to safely place the weight of our lives. How we do this for ourselves is highly individual and complex. It's a practice of attunement to our needs while responding to the present demands of our lives. The good news is, if you are reading this, you've been through your worst days this year and likely found some new ground and understanding through your hardships in ways you both anticipated and could not predict. Perhaps you've identified additional supports or opened up to and secured some help along the way. If today is among your worst days, I'm so glad you are reading this right now.

It just so happens this month is Mental Health Awareness Month. For family caregivers, most every month is mental health awareness month as their own mental health hangs in the balance and more

often, their focus being on the mental health of their care partner living with dementia. When life includes responding to the symptoms and changes of dementia, creating a familiar, secure and stable environment is a wise, noble and common intention. Unfortunately, it's hard to maintain and predict and things frequently do not go as planned. The risk inherent in reacting to the unexpected is how we may internalize and interpret an event, as many caregivers do, and fault ourselves when something goes awry. The space between our perception of how things *ought to be* and how things *actually are* can generate additional suffering and despair. Gradually, and quite harmfully, despair can become a way of living when problems feel intolerable and our ability to meet them, insurmountable. Mental health is at greater risk in caregiving and more so when we cannot alleviate and respond skillfully to common and temporary states of distress.

Family therapist, Sean Grover, wrote about persistent distress and despair this week in [Psychology Today](#) and examined its common presence through an affirming lens.

How does the following resonate with your own experience?

- Every life is eventually touched by tragedy. No one is exempt from sufferings such as illness or the loss of a loved one.
- Ways to reduce despair include acknowledging rather than hiding it, avoiding toxic positivity, and seeking out fellowship.
- Despair can bring a deeper understanding for the suffering of others.

You can explore these in greater detail [here](#) as well as 5 helpful ways to cope with despair.

The fulcrum of our wellbeing ultimately rests in our ability to pivot between different states and presence of mind. Just as we cannot stay or live well in the intensity of stress for long, nor can we remain in the lightness of positivity and pleasure. Neither are realistic to maintain indefinitely and yet, among and between the two we live and do our best to continue doing so.

“Every chapter of this pandemic brings its own set of challenges. If you are in a process of expanding your world after months of sheltering in place, you get to pace yourself. What is safe and what you are ready for may not be the same.

What your mind is ready for and what your body is ready for may not be the same.”

~Dr. Alexandra H. Solomon

In an effort to keep things stable, hypervigilant awareness of mental and emotional strain can generate a distorted view of our wellbeing and how we're coping. Can we be well even when we are experiencing suffering? Can we work with and honor the complexity of our mind and body states being both linked though highly differentiated? Based on what I have learned from family caregivers and adults with dementia, the answer is a resounding YES. When we recognize our own complex needs and understand we are more apt to focus on what is wrong than on what is right, we can intentionally create space for seeing and experiencing our daily lives with greater nuance and include room for all that is well too. From here, we are more likely to secure and reach for what we need, reliably returning to wellbeing and firmly giving ourselves permission to do so. Dementia family caregivers have more opportunities than most to acquire new strengths and I find their wisdom to be imbued with deep compassion. This is something we can all learn from and emulate, to approach ourselves with greater self-acceptance and compassion when we are struggling and the opportunity to apply the hard won wisdom of our experience to our lives.

A recent study examining the impact of COVID on older adults highlighted this important feature of mental and emotional strength. “The component of wisdom that is correlated most strongly (and inversely) with loneliness is compassion. Other data also suggest that enhancing compassion may reduce loneliness and promote greater well-being.” ([JAMA, November 2020](#))

Though each of us are unique, we share some foundational needs as it relates to mental health, including the need for stability and the need for compassionate and companionate support. What this constellation of support looks like for each of us will vary greatly. The important part is remaining open to receiving when we are accustomed to and perhaps more comfortable, giving.

Here are a few places to explore :

- [Mental Health America](#)
- [NAMI - Mental Health Awareness Month](#)
- [Family Caregiver Alliance](#)

And if you are a family caregiver, I hope you will join us on Monday for Catching Your Breath.

In gratitude,

—Laura Rice-Oeschger, LMSW



Wellness Program Registration

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 any time.

May 10, 10:00 - 11:30AM

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

Register for Catching Your Breath here

Have a Seat

Have a Seat is a free weekly, online, guided meditation program. No registration is required, just use the link below to join the program on Thursdays at noon.

Thursdays from 12:00 - 12:30PM

If you would like to subscribe to receive weekly reminders for Have a Seat, click [here](#).

Click to Join Have a Seat

Mitten Minds Support Group

This support group is available specifically for individuals with mild cognitive impairment or early-stage dementia.

May 18, 3:00 - 4:00PM

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

Register for Mitten Minds Support Group

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



Petrichor

The pleasant, earthy smell after rain.

Care Partner Resource at EMU

Dialectical Behavior Therapy program at EMU for Care Partners

Doctoral students at Eastern Michigan University, supervised by Dr. Claudia Drossel, have created a virtual program to coach care partner skills, cognitive remediation strategies, medical care navigation,

and more. This 8-week virtual group teaches dialectical behavior therapy caregiving skills, such as mindfulness, emotion regulation, interpersonal effectiveness, and distress tolerance in hopes these skills can help improve relationships among care partners.

For more information, contact the team at emu.canh@gmail.com or 734-627-7620. A flyer with more information can be found at the link below.

[More information about this program](#)

Upcoming Virtual Events

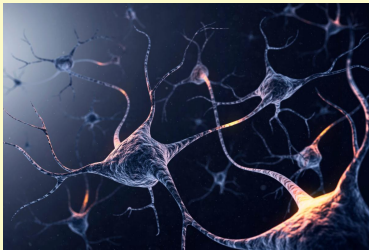


Lessons of Hardship and Hope by Michigan Dementia Minds

May 10, 6:30PM

Lessons of Hardship and Hope is an interactive storytelling performance by eight men living with dementia. It promotes dialogue between individuals living with dementia and the people around them. Their goals are to abolish the stigma associated with living with dementia, give voice to the lived experience and advocate for full inclusion of persons living with dementia. Lessons of Hardship and Hope allows persons living with dementia to initiate conversation and then answer questions from the audience in the Q&A session that follows the performance.

[Register for Lessons of Hardship and Hope](#)



The Latest Updates in Alzheimer's Disease Research

May 19, 5:00 - 6:30PM
May 21, 10:00 - 11:30AM

In partnership with the Alzheimer's Association, Dr. Scott Roberts will present two research presentations. Dr. Roberts is our Center's Outreach, Recruitment and Engagement Core Lead and a Professor of Health Behavior and Health Education at the U-M School of Public Health. Dr. Roberts will discuss the science of Alzheimer's and the latest in Alzheimer's and dementia research. Participants will also learn about the programs and resources available through the Alzheimer's Association.

[Register for one of the research presentations](#)



Exposures and Dementia Risk: What Do Environmental Chemicals Have To Do With It?

May 26, 2:00 - 3:00PM

The event will be presented by Kelly Bakulski, PhD, Data Core Lead of our Center and Assistant Professor of Epidemiology at the University of Michigan School of Public Health. Dr. Bakulski is an environmental and genetic epidemiologist with expertise in epigenetic epidemiology.

[Register for our May Speaker Series](#)

What's Your Style? How Your Caregiving Style Impacts The Care You Provide and Your Own Well-Being



June 22, 12:00 - 1:00PM

This event will be presented by Amanda Leggett, PhD, Research Assistant Professor within the University of Michigan Department of Psychiatry. Dr. Leggett currently has a study looking for participants. The study, STYLE Caregiving During COVID-19, is listed in the Research section below for more information.

Registration is required below.

Register for our June Speaker Series

New Research Studies Looking for Caregivers

The STYLE Caregiving During COVID Study (COVID STYLE):

Help us understand your dementia caregiving experience during the COVID-19 pandemic and how the pandemic and shelter-in-place policies impact caregivers' mental health and health services use. Study is recruiting primary caregivers for a friend or family member with a diagnosis of dementia. Contact Amanda Leggett and the COVID STYLE team at covidstyle@med.umich.edu or 734-623-9911. This study is entirely virtual (online survey and Zoom/phone) and takes approximately 2 hours.

More information about COVID STYLE study

Identifying Factors Predicting Accurately End-of-Life in Dementia with Lewy Bodies and Promoting Quality End-of Life Experiences (PACE-DLB)

We are excited to be a part of a new longitudinal research study in Lewy body dementia led by Dr. Melissa Armstrong, Director of the Mangurian Clinical-Research Headquarters for Lewy Body Dementia at the University of Florida. The *PACE-DLB* study aims to understand what changes might predict the end of life in people living with Lewy body dementia. This information will help patients, caregivers, families, and health care professionals know what to expect in later stages of LBD. The U-M site for this study is led by Drs. Susan Maixner, Associate Professor of Psychiatry, and Henry Paulson, Lucille Groff Professor of Neurology and Director of the Michigan Alzheimer's Disease Research Center. The study is looking to enroll individuals with at least moderate stage LBD and their main caregiver who must be able to answer questionnaires related to the LBD and caregiver experience. The study is conducted via Zoom or by phone. For more information, please contact Kelly Mattingly at mattinke@med.umich.edu or 734-223-9297.

More information about the PACE-DLB Study

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.

More information about the WeCareAdvisor Study

Self-Management, Health, and Resilience in Partners Study (SHARP):

Investigating experiences among couples living with multiple chronic health conditions to learn more about ways to help both partners live well together. Study is now recruiting a subgroup of couples in which one partner has received a diagnosis of dementia or mild cognitive impairment (MCI) and has early symptoms of dementia, both partners have two or more chronic conditions, and at least one partner is aged 50 or older. Contact the study team at sharpstudy@umich.edu or 734-232-4565. This study can be completed entirely over the phone.

Michigan Dementia Coalition's Lived Experience Committee Looking for Input from Persons Living with Dementia



**MICHIGAN
DEMENCIA COALITION**

The Michigan Dementia Coalition, a group of organizations and individuals working together to improve quality of life for people living with dementia and their families, is conducting a survey to learn more from individuals living with dementia in the community about their needs and barriers to participation in in-home

support services.

Coalition members encourage persons living with dementia to complete the questionnaire to ensure that their viewpoints are expressed, but filling the survey out with a family member or caregiver is acceptable. The questionnaire can be completed through an online Google form, direct mail, or a phone interview/Zoom call which can be arranged upon request.

Please visit the link below to fill the questionnaire out in person, and feel free to contact Kathleen Garvey at kgarvey2011@gmail.com with any questions or for more information.

Fill out the questionnaire

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