

SEPTEMBER 2019

BOOMERS, ELDERS & MORE

*A Monthly Elder Care Newsletter of
the Vanderbilt Child & Family Center*



SAVE THE DATES!

The Vanderbilt Child and Family Center
would love for you to join us for the
following events:

September 11: Caregiver Support Group
Godchaux Nursing Annex, 164

**September 18: Boomers, Elders & More
Speaker Series**
Godchaux Nursing Annex, 164

October 9: Caregiver Support Group
Godchaux Nursing Annex, 160

**October 16: Boomer, Elders & More
Speaker Series**
Godchaux Nursing Annex, 160

Keep an eye out for more information!

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Secret to Longer Life
for Seniors?

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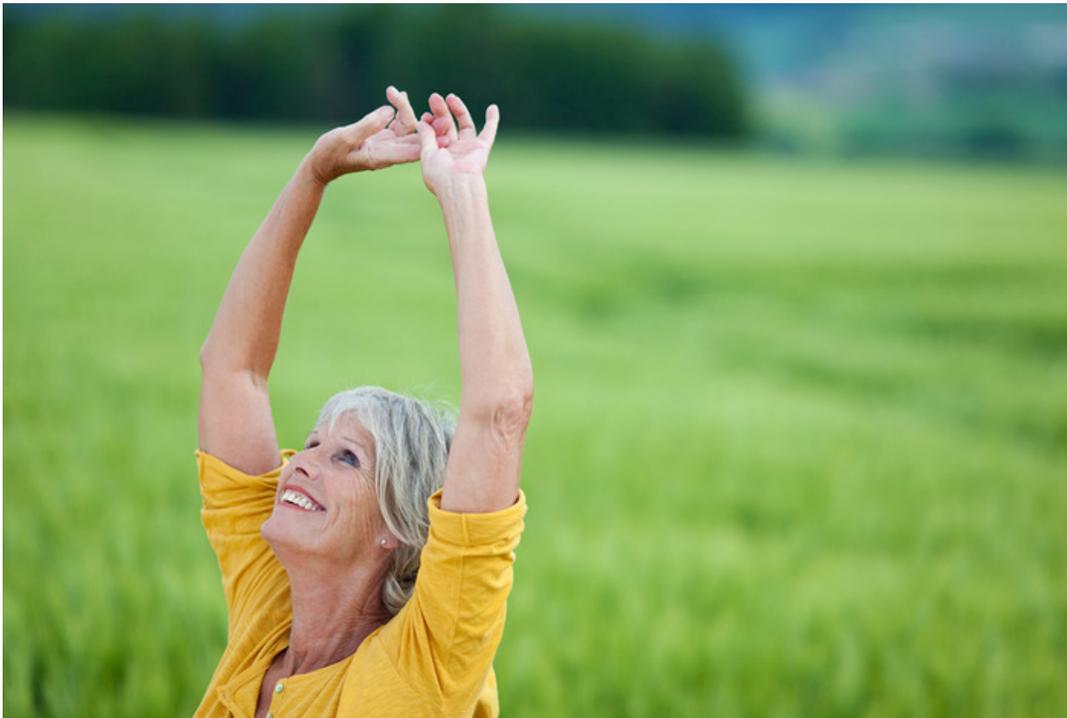
Community Events



VANDERBILT
Child and Family
Center

Is Happiness the Secret to a Longer Life for Seniors?

By Nancy Kupka PhD, RN, Walgreens



Physician and philosopher Dr. Albert Schweitzer once said, “Happiness is nothing more than good health and a bad memory.” Even if you don’t believe that bad memory contributes to happiness, most people would agree that good health might lead to happiness.

But does happiness lead to good health?

Actually, yes. Positive emotions are linked to better self-reported wellbeing in numerous scientific studies. Similarly, worry, anger and general unhappiness increase the risk of developing or worsening heart disease, arthritis and many other chronic health conditions.

How Happiness Affects Longevity

Happy people don't just enjoy life, they increase their chances of living longer. Recently, researchers looked at happiness data for people in the U.S. over a six-year period. The participants were divided into three groups: people who reported that they were “very happy,” “pretty happy” or “not happy.” The risk of death was lowest in the “very happy” group. Specifically, when compared to the “very happy” group, the risk of death was six percent higher among those who were “pretty happy” and 14 percent higher among those who were “not happy.” These results were seen even after taking into account demographic, socioeconomic and lifestyle-related factors. Fortunately, researchers have found that unhappiness does not necessarily contribute to an early or unexpected death. But happiness sure makes the time you have easier and more enjoyable.



Tips for Finding Happiness in Everyday Life

So, what can you do to improve your happiness? Check out these tips that you can incorporate into your lifestyle for a better chance of happiness and good health:

- Form meaningful relationships with relatives, friends and acquaintances. Studies show that even taking care of a beloved pet can help.
- Get involved in social activities, including those that are worship-related. Try going on regular social outings, join a weekly exercise or art class or sign up for bridge club.
- Appreciate the simple pleasures, such as a keeping to a regular schedule, taking a walk in the park or spending time with a friend.
- Learn not to sweat small stressors. Try to look at the bigger picture and spend your energy on what really matters to you. When you feel stressed, try using mindfulness, meditation, exercise or any other stress-release techniques that work for you.
- Do something to help others. Altruism, which is believing in or showing sincere concern for the wellbeing of others, can be beneficial for all of those involved. Volunteer at a local shelter or check in regularly with a neighbor who lives alone.
- Find value in your work. Whether it is your career, your hobbies or volunteer opportunities, it can help to look at your strengths in your everyday activities.

So, if you want to improve your sense of happiness as well as your sense of wellbeing, there are many things you can do. Call a friend you haven't talked to in a while and make plans to get together. Get involved in altruistic activities like a religious group or volunteer group. Or literally stop to smell the roses and enjoy the simple pleasures of life every day.

The Underappreciated Family Caregiver

Strategies for handling resentment and getting few thanks

By Barry J. Jacobs, AARP

"Your brother calls me every day," my 85-year-old mother often gushes. He lives 340 miles away and can't visit often, so his phone calls mean a lot to her. But her comment has always puzzled me. As her primary caregiver, I also call her every day, except for the several times a week I actually visit her in person. Yet she never crows proudly about my calls or visits or handling of her medications, finances, home health aides and insurance forms. I am left wondering whether she takes my efforts for granted.

Yes, the knowledge that we are doing the right thing for our loved ones should be our biggest reward. But it's nice to receive acknowledgment from the people we care for: Pats on the back can go a long way toward boosting caregiver morale. Otherwise, it's hard not to feel miffed.



At my grumpiest moments, I resent that my brother does far less than me and yet wins kudos I never hear. That doesn't inspire me to work harder on my mother's behalf and sometimes makes me irritable with him.

There are many reasons why hard-working caregivers may be underappreciated. The aging parent may resent needing assistance and therefore begrudge thanks to her primary helper out of spite. Or the monotony of regular care routines may lull them into simply expecting a caregiver's sacrifices as part of daily life.

How can you get a little well-deserved respect without acting like an attention-seeking complainer? I have some ideas:

Toot your own horn. In the business world, employers often ask their employees for a year-end list of their accomplishments. As an executive-level family caregiver, you don't need so formal a process but ought to keep other family members informed of the myriad tasks you manage. For example, you could send out a group email describing the recent medical appointment to which you took the care receiver. Or you could convey recent financial transactions you conducted. When family members understand the scope of your duties, they may be more likely to show appreciation or even willingness to help.

Use humor. When my kids were very young and a little too demanding, I often responded half-humorously, " 'Please' and 'thank you' might help." The equivalent sly comment to prompt adults to be more courteous and appreciative is to ask, "What am I, chopped liver?" Oftentimes, care receivers become so self-absorbed with their own suffering that they stop paying attention to their caregivers' efforts. They may need a light-hearted reminder to acknowledge your work, such as, "You don't have to thank me. I'm in it for the money."

Acknowledge care receivers' efforts. Sometimes, the best way to get thanks is to give it first. Set a tone of mutual appreciation by thanking the care receiver for all she did for you years ago. It might help her see your caregiving for her now as reciprocating her own efforts with you as a child. And thank her for any help she gives you; you will be encouraging her to assist you more, and maybe make it more likely she will thank you in return. If she does say "Thank you," always respond "You're welcome," to acknowledge the gesture.

Pat your own back. If family members ultimately can't or won't express appreciation, then you may have to accept their limitations. You can't squeeze blood from stones; you can't wring thanks from the stone-hearted. In the end, you have to appreciate yourself, knowing that you are doing good work and for the right reasons. To paraphrase an old Ricky Nelson song, you can't please everyone — or anyone — all of the time. Sometimes you just have to please yourself.



*Barry J. Jacobs, a clinical psychologist, family therapist and healthcare consultant, is the co-author of the book **AARP Meditations for Caregivers** (Da Capo, 2016).*

Follow him on Twitter @drbarryjacobs and on Facebook.

7 Ways to Step Up Your Self-Care as You Age

Try these things for a healthier mind and body – and to just feel good

By Patricia Corrigan



How do you cope with aging?

I've been thinking about that question since first exploring it two years ago on Next Avenue. This time, I was prompted to add to my list after a rather unusual conversation with my doctor.

Below are seven of my self-care “do’s.” What are yours?

1. Get off the medical merry-go-round. “I am not accepting any additional medical conditions at this time.” That’s what I told my doctor earlier this month when she proposed a couple of tests to “rule out possibilities” of other medical conditions related to my growing older.

Saying “No” to the doctor is a powerful way to step off the medical merry-go-round when you’re sick of the ride, sick of the appointments, sick of the tests and all the follow-up conversations — and sick of thinking of yourself as a patient instead of as a whole person. Of course, I would have agreed to the tests if I thought I was putting my health in danger. But after I rebelled, even the doctor agreed that “waiting and seeing” would do no harm.

2. Protect your body. Many Next Avenue readers are Too Old to Fall, and well aware of the damage that can be done if you move too quickly, overlook uneven pavement or miss a step where you didn’t expect one. Now is the time to use railings! Where there aren’t railings, use the wall, the branches of a shrub, the hood of a car or whatever will get you safely from point A to B. Leery of leaning on a cane? A trekking pole can provide extra stability. Due to an antibiotic that never should have been prescribed for me, I have a troubled Achilles tendon. Every day, I have to remember to protect it from further injury. (No more hopping over flower boxes.) I do all the exercises that strengthen the tendon, and I sometimes play cheerleader. “The Achilles tendon,” I tell mine, “is the longest and the strongest tendon in the body. You will get better.”

3. Save your sanity. In July, reporter Emily Yahr wrote in The Washington Post about a woman who was pondering how to better balance the joys in our personal lives with the current political climate. (As Next Avenue has noted, some mental health professionals use the terms “election stress disorder” and “headline stress disorder.”) “Deep down, it’s easy to feel as though you’re doing something wrong for not focusing enough attention on serious issues,” Yahr said in her article.

Leslie Davenport, a psychotherapist in the San Francisco Bay Area, is all for staying educated and informed. But, she adds, “The dramatic and distressing aspects of the news — whatever one’s affiliations — have many people obsessing, going far beyond what is useful or healthy.” Turn away from the news from time to time, she says. Hey, the circus will continue without you while you go for a walk.

4. Use it or lose it. Make time to do those physical therapy exercises that help with osteoarthritis and other painful structural conditions, no matter how boring they seem. Restorative yoga poses, done on the living room floor every day, will provide gentle stretches that enhance flexibility, which makes it easier to get back up off the floor.

Also, it’s important to educate yourself beyond any brochures provided by your therapist or doctor. You may want to read *Crooked: Outwitting the Back Pain Industry and Getting on the Road to Recovery* by Cathryn Jakobson Ramin, a science journalist with her own back pain. Spoiler alert: What finally worked for her was a multidisciplinary therapy program. Inspired by her experience, I’ve enrolled in a pain management clinic.

5. Pay what you need to for treatment. Eye drops applied every hour I’m awake and two ointments used four times a day and again at night make for big bills at the pharmacy. Because they are over-the-counter, insurance doesn’t pay for them. But 60 days of this regimen has helped calm a corneal disease. Oh, I’ve asked for samples and I’ve sought out coupons, but I also have concluded that the hope for restored vision makes the expense all worth it.

At 69, I need other lotions, potions, creams, unguents, oils and balms to moisturize crepey skin, soften thinning lips and hydrate brittle nails. I'm not picky; I tend to buy whatever is on sale. Plus, one circle of friends willingly shares recommendations for inexpensive skin care products. Sometimes, on holidays, we even give each other tubes of favorite hand creams as gifts.

6. Pamper your feet. Don't forget the foot lotion, says Dr. Randal Aaranson, a podiatrist and medical school professor in St. Louis. He notes that using moisturizer on your feet every day will help you avoid cracked heels, bacterial infections and even athlete's foot. If this advice comes a little late for you, Aaranson cautions against what podiatrists call "bathroom surgery with filthy tools." See a doctor instead. If your feet hurt, that's another reason to visit a podiatrist. "Feet are not supposed to hurt," Aaranson says. "Ever." Plus, when you adjust your gait to protect sore feet, you can throw your hips and spine out of alignment. Remember: Everything is connected.

7. Figure out what's good for your cells. In a group therapy session for cancer patients some years ago, I listened as a commodity broker spoke of his meltdown at the office. In the middle of a particularly stressful call, he said, the man realized his professional situation likely was hurting his healing. "I suddenly understood that my job and the tension I carried all the time was not good for my cells," he said. He ended that phone call and proceeded to quit his job, effective immediately. That story affects me deeply to this day, and I often make decisions based on what's good for my cells. That's why I spoke up at the doctor's office when she recommended additional tests. I'm already managing a couple of health conditions, and I don't have any interest in taking on more. At this point in my life, no matter what hurts or isn't working quite right, it's important to make time for joy.



Fun for All! **Community Events** **September 2019**



The Tennessee State Fair is Friday to Sunday, September 6-15, 2019, at **The Fairgrounds Nashville**. Get ready for rides, contests (including ice-cream eating, corn hole, and karaoke, just to name a few), fair food, vendors, and fun for the whole family. Tickets range from free to \$25, depending on age and ticket type. General admission for adults is \$8.



The Greater Nashville Heart Walk is Sept. 14 at **Vanderbilt University's Capers Field** at 8am. The Heart Walk is the American Heart Association's premiere event for raising funds to fight heart disease and stroke, this country's no. 1 and no. 5 killers. We're expecting over 10k Middle Tennesseans! It's a fun, family friendly event. Together, the community is walking to save lives. The event is opportunity for individuals to celebrate their own health journey, celebrate survivors, caregivers, and honor lost loved ones.



The Cheekwood Harvest is Saturday, September 21, 2019 to Sunday, October 27, 2019, from 9:00am to 5:00pm at **Cheekwood Estate and Gardens**. This six-week event celebrates the autumnal season and will include activities for kids, adults, and the whole family. Guests will need to purchase general Cheekwood admission tickets to attend this event.