

January 2022

Boomers, Elders, and More E-Newsletter

Monthly Elder Care Newsletter of the Vanderbilt Child & Family Center



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A Message from the Wellbeing Manager

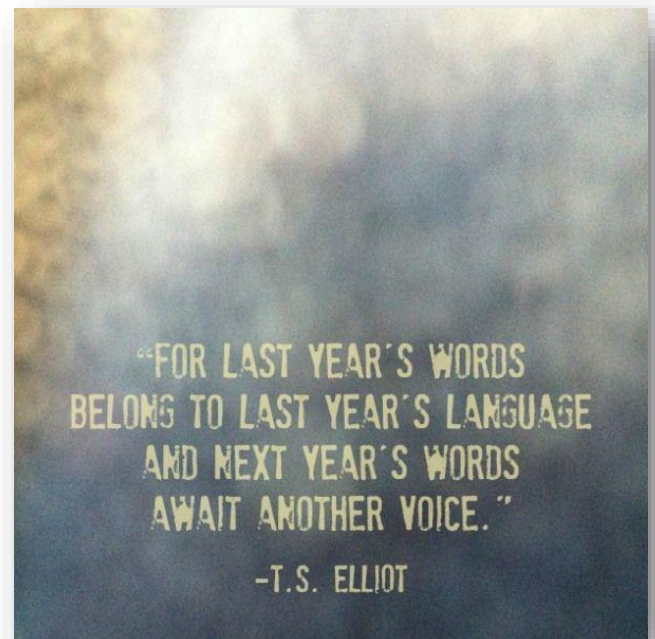
Happy New Year!

The New Year is a great time to establish goals. After the hectic pace of the holidays, the New Year provides a welcome “fresh start” – a chance to adjust your habits and attitudes in ways that make you healthier and happier.

As a caregiver, a New Year provides a chance to reflect on the joys and challenges of caregiving in the past year, and look for ways to make the experience more positive for both you and your loved one in the year ahead.

Vanderbilt Child and Family Center can support you in making this experience positive by offering resources, information and encouragement.

If you have suggestions for upcoming learning sessions or if you know of anyone who would like to subscribe to the e-newsletter, please contact me directly at stacey.l.bonner@vanderbilt.edu.



Affirmative Thinking: How can it help you as a caregiver?

By Cindy Connolly

Research indicates that positive thinking can actually be very beneficial. Even when circumstances are impossible to change, or when caregiving challenges feel overwhelming, your physical and mental wellbeing can benefit from crowding out negative thoughts.

A few health benefits of positive thinking include:

Protection from heart attacks. People with a family history of heart disease, who also had a positive outlook, were one-third less likely to have a heart attack or other cardiovascular event than those with a more negative outlook, [according to Johns Hopkins researcher Lisa R. Yanek, M.P.H. and her colleagues](#). The study also found that positive people from the general population were 13 percent less likely than their negative counterparts to have a heart attack or other coronary event. One theory is that a positive outlook may protect against the inflammatory damage of stress.

Longer life span. A [study from the Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health](#) found that women who were optimistic had a significantly reduced risk of dying from several major causes of death – including cancer, heart disease, stroke, respiratory disease and infection – over an eight-year period, compared with women who were less optimistic. Healthy behaviors only partially explain the link between optimism and reduced mortality risk, the study surmised. One other possibility is that higher optimism directly impacts our biological systems, said Eric Kim, research fellow in the Department of Social and Behavioral Sciences and co-lead author of the study.

Boosted immunity. A positive attitude was shown to play an important part in healthy aging. A [University of Queensland study](#) followed 50 adults ages 65 to 90 for over two years and found those who focused on positive information were more likely to have stronger immune systems. Optimism appeared to enhance immunity at the other end of the age spectrum, as well, [in a study of first-year law students by University of Kentucky researchers](#).

Overall psychological and physical wellbeing. Positive thinking also contributes to lower rates of depression, lower levels of distress and better coping skills during times of hardships and stress, [according to Mayo Clinic](#). Optimistic people are also believed to have healthier lifestyles. They tend to get more physical activity, follow a healthier diet and avoid smoking or drinking alcohol in excess, Mayo reports.

How can you make your thinking more positive? It can help to start small, by selecting one area of your life you'd like to be more positive about. Then build from there.

There is no question you may feel you're steering a boat in very troubled waters. When caregiving is added to the mix, the challenges can be even greater. Reframing your thoughts in a more positive direction can help you to navigate in a way that benefits your health and well-being and, in turn, that of your loved one.

Find the full article at: [Affirmative Thinking: How Can It Help You as a Caregiver? | Guideposts](#)



Caregiving: There's an app for that

By Marc Salzman, AARP

There are so many apps that have been developed to support family caregivers.

With so many caregiving and other related health and wellness applications in the App Store for iPhones and iPads and in Google Play for Android devices, finding something worthy could prove to be an overwhelming endeavor.

“The popularity of smartphones has really catalyzed the app space,” says Laurie M. Orlov, speaker, journalist and founder of Aging in Place Technology Watch.

“There are many apps to help caregivers and their loved ones, whether it’s to help track someone, shop for supplies, look up trusted information, manage medication, schedule appointments, book transportation, find specialty pharmacies or join support groups – just to name a few examples,” says Orlov, based in Port St. Lucie, Florida.

Look no further if you’re in search of a few recommended and free apps, available for Apple and Android.

CareZone

A comprehensive app for caregivers, [CareZone](#) offers several handy features.

You can scan your family member’s pill bottles to instantly create a detailed list of medications to share with doctors. Or sign up for automatic reminders tied to going to appointments; taking

medication; refilling prescriptions and having them delivered to your door for free.

CareZone also curates relevant news about your loved one’s condition, disability or illness. Finally, scan your insurance card via your smartphone’s camera to see if there are discounts on Medicare, available in all 50 states.

Caring Village

Another great app for managing care for loved ones, [Caring Village](#) lets you create a custom “village,” really a group, to communicate and coordinate care, such as arranging transportation and meals. You can include as many people as you’d like in your village and easily assign roles to individuals.

But the app can do a lot more: keep track of medications, take advantage of the preparedness checklists, upload important documents you can access anywhere, use the secure in-app messaging feature and write in a wellness journal.

Lotsa Helping Hands

This [popular caregiving app](#) helps you create and coordinate a community of care around a loved one. You can invite whomever you’d like to the group – such as family, friends, neighbors and professional help – and easily manage everything through the app’s intuitive dashboard and calendar feature.

Communicate appointment information; schedule meals, rides and visits; and solicit help by posting requests. You can blast updates, receive messages from loved ones, and share photos from this one app instead of dealing with multiple calls, emails and texts.

Find the full article at: [Apps to Help Caregivers with Daily Tasks \(aarp.org\)](#)

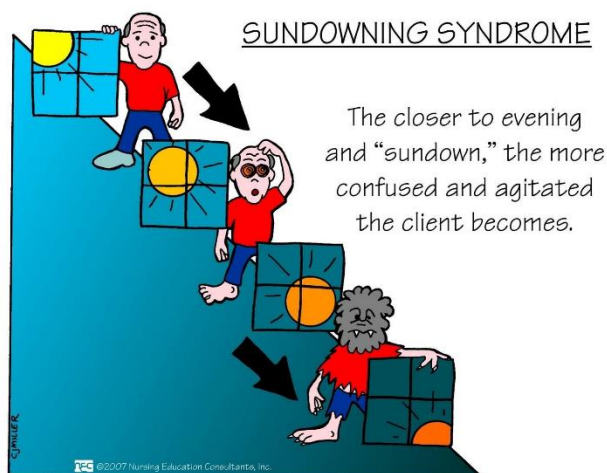


The Challenges of Sundowning

Many people with Alzheimer's disease or dementia become confused, anxious, and/or agitate later in the day. These sundowning symptoms can be difficult to manage.

Tips for Peaceful Evenings

1. *Track behavior and look for triggers.*
 - Use a notebook to track and identify triggers causing agitation or anxiety.
 - Reduce or minimize triggers.
2. *Ensure that basic and emotional needs are being met. Don't wait for them to ask.*
 - 1-2 hours prior to when symptoms usually start, check on the following...
 - Feeling pain or discomfort
 - Hungry or thirsty
 - Depressed
 - In need of the toilet
 - Bored
 - Too hot or cold
3. *Minimize noise, distractions and shadows.*
 - Increase feelings of safety by closing curtains and blinds before the sun starts setting to avoid reflections or shadows from outside.
 - Turn on plenty of lights to eliminate scary shadows or dark corners.
4. *Stick to a daily routine.*
 - Set regular times for waking up, meals and going to sleep.
 - Schedule appointments, outings, visitors and bath time for earlier in the day.
5. *Create a relaxing environment.*
 - Play soft music at a low volume and lightly scent the room with lavender.
 - Use a weighted blanket for sleeping or resting.



CAREGIVER SUPPORT GROUP

The Caregiver Support Group is a monthly group that offers a safe place to discuss the stresses, challenges and rewards of providing care for an aging loved one. The meetings will be held virtually for the foreseeable future from noon to 1 p.m.

January's session will be held on Wednesday, January 12, 2022, from noon to 1 p.m. Please RSVP (stacey.l.bonner@vanderbilt.edu) for Zoom details by Wednesday, January 12.



LEARNING SESSION

The Learning Session is a monthly educational meeting to receive valuable information while providing care to your loved one.

This month, Lynn Wood, Caregiver Support Coordinator with Mental Health America of the MidSouth, will speak on Caregiver Stress and The Value of Self Care.

January's learning session will be held on Wednesday, January 19, 2022, from 1:30 p.m. to 2:30 p.m. Please RSVP (stacey.l.bonner@vanderbilt.edu) for Zoom details by Tuesday, January 18.



“Caregiving often calls us to lean into love we didn’t know possible.”

- Tia Walker, from The Inspired Caregiver