This Issue: WHOLE HEALTH IN YOUR LIFE!

THE ART OF LISTENING TO YOURSELF
by María Loebach, RN

“When you are balanced and when you listen and attend to the needs of your body, mind, and spirit, your natural beauty comes out.”
-- Christy Turlington

How often do you stop and ask yourself what you need and/or desire? Why is this important? As a Caregiver, you are often spending much of your time and energy tending to the needs of your loved one and may forget that you have needs of your own. While Caregiving can be rewarding and positive, research shows that the stressors of caregiving can have an impact on physical, mental and emotional health and well-being. Therefore, it is essential to tend to your own needs, and this requires cultivating the art of listening to yourself.

This practice simply requires taking a few moments of quiet to ask yourself what you need in this moment, and then listening for a response. You may be surprised at what you hear! Maybe it’s as simple (yet vital) as taking time to drink a glass of water or stepping outdoors for a few deep breaths of fresh air. Or maybe it’s acknowledging you are overdue for a wellness exam and you schedule an appointment with your PCP. Or listening to that yearning to connect with your good friend, so you call that friend up for a coffee date.

Learning to listen to yourself takes practice and self-compassion. Cultivating this deeper level of self-wisdom will support you on your path of wholeness, and I invite you to start today!

Simple Practice
- Take 3 slow, deep breaths to center yourself.
- Place your hand on your heart or belly.
- Ask yourself, “What does my body/mind/heart need today?”
- Listen.
- Take action and offer gratitude for taking time to listen and love yourself.
 Assertive Communication Lowers Stress & Improves Relationships  

By Amber Lynch, LCSW

According to a recent article by the Mayo Clinic, being assertive means “that you express yourself effectively and stand up for your point of view, while also respecting the rights and beliefs of others”. Assertiveness means delivering your message in a direct and respectful way and being willing to resolve conflict. Assertive communication is linked with higher self-esteem, better stress management and more positive relationships.

Not only is what you say important but **HOW** you say it. The Mayo Clinic article stated, “If you communicate in a way that's too passive or too aggressive, your message may get lost because people are too busy reacting to your delivery.”

On one hand, passive communication sends the message that your thoughts and feelings aren’t as important as those of others. It can give others the message that it is okay to disregard your feelings, wants and needs. In addition, passive behavior can lead to stress, resentment, anger, and feeling like a victim.

On the other hand aggressive behavior can seem like bullying and lacking in regard for the feelings, needs and desires of others. Very aggressive behavior can come across as humiliating and intimidating to others. While aggressive behavior may get you what you want, there is a cost- it erodes trust, mutual respect and intimacy in relationships.

Assertiveness is considered a healthy communication style. Being assertive offers many benefits, including the following: increased self-confidence, increased respect from others, improved relationship satisfaction, improved job satisfaction.

Want to become more assertive? Here are some tips from the Mayo Clinic:

**Assess your style.**

Do you voice your opinions or remain silent? Do you say yes to additional work even when your plate is full? Are you quick to judge or blame? Do people seem to dread or fear talking to you? Understand your style before you begin making changes.

**Use 'I' statements.**

Using "I" statements lets others know what you’re thinking or feeling without sounding accusatory. Keep your requests simple and specific.

**Practice saying no.**

If you have a hard time turning down requests, try saying, "No, I can't do that now." Don't hesitate — be direct. If an explanation is appropriate, keep it brief.

**Rehearse what you want to say.**

Practice typical scenarios you encounter. Say what you want to say out loud. It may help to write it out first, too, so you can practice from a script.

**Use body language.**

Communication isn't just verbal. Act confident even if you aren't feeling it. Keep an upright posture, but lean forward a bit. Make regular eye contact.

**Keep emotions in check.**

Conflict is hard for most people. If you feel too emotional going into a situation, wait a bit if possible. Then work on remaining calm. Breathe slowly. Keep your voice even and firm.

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The Caregiver Support Line offers monthly telephone education groups designed specifically for Caregivers and family members supporting and caring for Veterans. These telephone groups are focused on strategies to enhance resilience and restore balance.

Please let the Caregiver Support Program team know if you are interested in attending a group by calling 503.273.5210. Registration is required 3 business days prior to the call.

Here are the upcoming Care for the Caregiver education calls:

**FEBRUARY**

“Tending Loves Flame: Keeping the Love Alive”

Wednesday, February 6th  
7am  
**Or**

Wednesday, February 14th  
4pm  
**Or**

Wednesday, February 21st  
12pm
VA Portland Health Care System has been selected as one of the 18 sites across the nation to offer a new way to provide care to Veterans and Caregivers. It is based in partnership with Veterans and Caregivers to improve their whole health. This is critical when Veterans deal with such complex issues as pain and the invisible wounds of war. This method of providing care also helps reduce the burden on the Veteran’s primary caregiver and family.

Whole Health is an approach to health care that empowers and equips people to take charge of their health, well-being, and to live their life to the fullest.

The Whole Health approach starts with us thinking about health in a new way. Envision what matters most to you. What brings you joy and happiness? Is it traveling, playing with your children or grandchildren, or just feeling at peace in your body? We shift the focus of looking at one’s health by starting a conversation with: What matters most to you in your life rather than what’s the matter with you?

The human body and mind have tremendous healing abilities that work to strengthen together to heal. Rather than focusing on the challenges of living, think about what encourages us to work through those challenges. What drives us to stick with our rehabilitation, to watch our diet, or to seek help for issues we are facing? Now, envision yourself at your healthiest. What do you see?

The Components of Proactive Health and Well-Being (in the next column) show the connections between our health and other areas of our life. With this visual, we can see that improving one part of our life can benefit other aspects of our health. It also means that health teams will get to know Veterans and Caregivers as individuals, working with each to develop a personalized health plan based on your values, needs, and goals. This way of care connects you, the Caregiver, to more services within the health care system, and creates a partnership in care.

You and the care team will work to identify resources and support to help you be in your best health and reach your goals. Think about the basic things that can influence our health. Are we are getting enough sleep at night? Are we eating well? Are we getting enough fresh air and sunshine? This model of whole health care, is designed to help each of us achieve and maintain our best all-around health and well-being. Reflecting on these factors in our life will also impact our well-being.

This approach to care can support us to be our happiest and healthiest selves and the healthier we are, the healthier our family members will be!

“In the midst of movement and chaos, keep stillness inside of you”

--Deepak Chopra
NATIONAL FAMILY CAREGIVER MONTH REPORT

By Leah Christensen, LCSW

Each November, the nation takes time to honor Family Caregivers, who give so much of themselves throughout the year, as they care for their loved one. This year, the VA Portland Caregiver Support Program offered a few events in honor or you, our Family Caregivers.

Here are some highlights:

On November 13th, the Caregiver Support Program provided information and materials to caregivers, Veterans and providers about the Caregiver Support Program and caregiving in the VA Portland atrium. Many received much needed information about caring for Veterans.

On November 14th, we gathered for tea with caregivers at the Salem Clinic. The tea provided the chance to gather together and connect with other caregivers in their local community.

On November 17th, the VA Portland Caregiver Support Program joined the Washington County Family Caregiver Program and Tuality Health Care in offering the annual caregiver conference for caregivers caring for older adults. This year’s conference was: “Nourishing your Mind, Body, & Spirit”. The key note speaker Paul Iarrobino presented on “The Practical Side of Caregiving and Resilience”.

Other workshops included:
• What Matters Most to You: Whole Health & You
• Maintaining a Loving Relationship While Meeting the Challenges of Caregiving
• Effective Approaches to Common Challenging Behaviors
• Legal Considerations for Family Caregivers
• Caregiving: It’s a Practice & It Takes A Lot of Practice
• Paying for Care When Funds are Limited

We honor you, our Family Caregivers of Veterans, every day. Thank you for all you do to care for the men and women who served our country.

CHAIR YOGA

Chair Pigeon
(Eka Pada Rajakapotasana)

Sit upright in your chair with spine straight and chest open, legs parallel and feet hip-width apart.

Bring your right ankle to rest on your left thigh, keeping the left knee in line with your left ankle as much as possible.

Hold this chair pigeon for three to five breaths.

You may forward bend to intensify the stretch if you like.

Repeat with the left leg.

https://www.verywell.com/chair-yoga-poses-3567189

“Caregiving often calls us to lean into love we didn’t know possible”
- Tia Walker
The Benefits of Doing Nothing  
By Amber Lynch, LCSW

Our lives are often defined by busyness. While the ability to accomplish tasks is a good thing, staying busy all the time can have a detrimental effect on our overall health.

A coworker recently told me she needed time to “defragment” her mind on a daily basis in order to perform at her best. She was referring to taking a pause, calming her mind, and taking a break from the near constant thoughts and actions in which we engage in daily life. In other words, she takes intentional breaks to “do nothing”, which allows her to integrate her thoughts, feelings and plans.

Introspection and reflection are able to happen when we “do nothing”, when we slow down and allow space for relaxation, restoration and integration. It reminds me of taking my foot off the gas pedal and allowing myself to coast to a slower and slower speed, even if for a few minutes. When I intentionally allow this space, I am better able to invite creativity and inspiration into my life, not to mention a feeling of calm and well-being as opposed to feeling frazzled by constant action and information overload.

Here are some ways to facilitate “doing nothing”:

• When you have a few minutes between tasks, appointments, meetings, take a few focused breaths instead of looking at your phone.
• Schedule “Do Nothing breaks”. Schedule 5-15 minutes of mindful rest or reflection on a daily basis.
• Say NO more often. Say NO to taking on too much. Say NO to unimportant requests and distractions.
• Make art in a playful way. Sketch a flower, play the ukulele, doodle.
• Get out in nature. Enjoy the sun or breeze on your face. Lie in a field. Gaze at the clouds.
• Take a nap.
• Now, at the beginning of the year, is a great time to build “doing nothing” into your daily lives. It may bring you a sense of balance that will enhance your quality of life, which you so deserve.

VA CAREGIVER RESOURCE FOR YOU:

Building Better Caregivers

What is Building Better Caregivers™ (BBC)?

Building Better Caregivers™ (BBC) is an online workshop for Caregivers who are caring for someone with dementia, memory problems, post-traumatic stress disorder, a serious brain injury, or any other serious injury or illness. BBC helps Caregivers in two key ways: it offers training in how to provide better care, and it also helps Caregivers learn how to manage their own emotions, stress and physical health. Caregiving can be an extremely demanding job, and many Caregivers experience isolation and burnout. Some of the most important aspects of becoming a better Caregiver are learning how to manage stress and take good care of yourself.

Topics include:

• Managing your stress.
• Communicating more effectively with family, friends, and health professionals.
• Taking care of your own health while caregiving.
• Managing difficult emotions like frustration, fear, and loneliness.
• Managing difficult behaviors, angry outbursts and violence.
• Setting goals and working toward them.
• Getting support from other caregivers and sharing your experiences.
• Tips on how to provide better care.

How do I Join Building Better Caregivers™?

New Dementia Education Program Offerings

The Dementia Education Program at VA Portland will be offering a new series of workshops based on input from caregivers! Each workshop will be two-hours long and offered at multiple VA sites of care. Workshops are geared toward dementia caregivers but are open to family members, Veterans, community members, and staff.

Winter 2018
• Stress Reduction
• Communication and Dementia

Spring 2018
• Long Term Care Planning – locations TBD
• Savvy Caregiver – Salem, Center 50 Plus

Summer 2018
• Stages of Dementia – locations TBD
• Common Safety Issues and Dementia – locations TBD

To learn more about the new Dementia Education Program or to sign up for Introduction to Dementia Workshops, contact Kristi Ketchum, LCSW at (503) 220-8262 ext. 58594 or Laura Tauber, LCSW at (503) 220-8262 ext. 51151.

VA Cancer Care Navigation Team offers:
Veteran and Caregiver Support Group
(for Veterans who have Cancer or Loved Ones Provided Caregiving to a Veteran with Cancer)

When: Thursdays, 10am-12pm

Where: VA Portland Health Care System/ VA Portland Medical Center, 3710 SW US Veterans Hospital Road, Portland OR 97239 6th Floor 6 D-126 Conference Room

To register: Call Marcia Long, LCSW, OSW-C, at 503-220-82632, ext. 51754

CHECK IT OUT!

VA Office of Patient Centered Care & Cultural Transformation

WHOLE HEALTH RESOURCES

Want to learn more about personal health planning?

Mindfulness Coach: https://mobile.va.gov/app/mindfulness-coach

Guided Meditation/Podcast
https://www.va.gov/patientcenteredcare/podcast_files/TG-GuidedMeditationPodcast_GuidedRelaxation_PHI_Complete.mp3

For more resources, visit https://www.va.gov/patientcenteredcare/index.asp

Caregiver Support Program

VA Portland Health Care System

503-273-5210
2018 Upcoming Bend Caregiver Workshops:

Thursday, February 22, 2018 1:00 – 3:00
Topic: “Why Do I Feel So Exhausted?” Caregiver Stress and What It Means For Your Health
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Thursday, April 26, 2018 1:00 – 3:00
Topic: “Are You Ready For The Future?” Legal Issues and Long-Term Care Planning
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All sessions will be held in the Sister’s Conference Room 2nd floor of the Bend VA Clinic.
2650 NE Courtney Drive – Bend, OR Everyone is Welcome

For questions or more information, please contact:
Jen Lawrence, MA, LCSW – Social Worker  (503) 351-5041

Caregiver/Community Corner

OREGON CARE PARTNERS

Oregon Care Partners is pleased to be able to provide quality training to you at no cost, thanks to funding by the State of Oregon aimed at improving long term care services for aging Oregonians and building caregiver knowledge and skills. To ensure you have access to the training you need, classes are available both online and in-person. In-person classes are held around the state and led by caring professionals in the field of long term care. Online classes are self-paced and most take only an hour to complete.

https://oregoncarepartners.com/

EASTER SEALS OPERATION FAMILY CAREGIVER (WASHINGTON STATE)

Operation Family Caregiver coaches the families and friends of newly returning service members and veterans to manage difficult transitions. Operation Family Caregiver (OFC) provides free and confidential support to the families of those who have served our nation. We help the families of returning service members and veterans adjust to the "new normal" by coping more effectively with problems they never imagined. Our specially trained coaches help military families learn how to overcome the obstacles they face and to manage any challenges that might come along.


“The list of local resources in this section is provided as a courtesy of VAPORHCS. None of these agencies or providers are affiliated with VAPORHCS and VAPORHCS does not endorse or recommend any agency or provider on this list. Nor does this list constitute a referral by VAPORHCS to any of the listed entities. Use of any of these services or providers is at your own risk.”