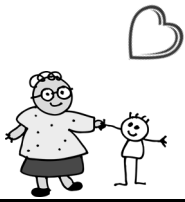


GRANDparents Connection



For Grandparents Raising Grandchildren

Importance of Caring for You

Dear Grandparents,

Stress is always a factor in day-to-day life but these days stress seems to be constant rather than something that comes and goes.

When we feel constant stress, our body can experience both physical and emotional woes that may lead to chronic disease. As a grandparent raising their grandchildren you probably feel the stress of dealing with family, raising children (again) and navigating life during a pandemic even more challenging than others might. The added stress you may feel of caring for a grandchild is why it is so important to care for yourself as a caregiver.

There are many ways to care for yourself from eating nutrient dense meals, exercising, finding time to relax, getting quality sleep and spending time with friends and family, however the reality of doing these things is not so easy. Life-style changes are difficult but caring for yourself as you care for your grandchildren means a better quality of life for you now and in the future.

This newsletter will give you small steps to compliment the workshops being offered at our meetings allowing you to find gradual ways to care for you.

Christine Zellers, MPP

FCHS Educator /Assistant Professor
Family and Community Health Sciences
Rutgers Cooperative Extension
of Cape May County

Support Groups

According to Harvard Health you have already completed a very important part of caring for yourself as you attend the grandparents raising grandchildren meetings. Being part of a support group with people who are experiencing similar situations allows you time to find compassion for yourself. The author of Self Care for the Caregiver, Dr. Marlynn Wei, MD, JD says, “realizing that you’re not alone and that others are going through similar experiences nurtures your ability to be self compassionate.” Many of our grandparents have become friends over the years and as we started meeting again post-lock down it was nice to see you waving at each other and saying hello after so much time apart. Not everyone has the same story or same situation but realizing you are not alone can provide a sense of support and understanding. When we meet try to say hello to someone new every month, just having a short conversation with another person who is a caregiver will make you feel supported.

Mind-Body Practices

The Grandparents Raising Grandchildren program meetings have started offering physical health support as well as peer support. For example, Teri O’Conner from NJ Beach Yoga came to visit in November of 2021 and taught us how important just breathing is.

Breathing is an easy place to start caring for yourself. That may sound silly, of course you breathe all the time but do you really take time to let all that air in and out of your lungs. Try taking 7-10 deep breaths when things become stressful or just to do something nice for yourself. Practicing breathing can help you balance the day and see things more clearly. An added benefit of taking a few minutes to decompress and breathe is the sense of well-being it will provide.

The ability to be calm and relax is good for your health and for your relationship with your grandchild. It can offer clarity in parenting, patience, and more enjoyment from life. Mind-body practices like yoga and Tai Chi support chronic disease prevention for diseases like Alzheimer’s and cancer too.

Exercise and physical activity are important parts of living a healthy lifestyle but also a critical part of caring for yourself as a caregiver.

Exercise For Better Mind and Body

It is never too late to start exercising but check with a doctor for individual health needs and what is safe for you.

Exercise can make everyday activities easier according to the *Physical Activity Guidelines for Americans*. In addition to preventing chronic disease, moving more could make eating, bathing, dressing, and getting in and out of bed easier. Being active regularly helps to prevent falls because it can increase strength, flexibility, and balance. People also tend to sleep better and have less anxiety and depression when they exercise regularly.

It is recommended that exercise be done for at least 150 minutes per week to decrease the chances of chronic disease. Even though exercise expends energy, it will give you a feeling of being more energized, focused and can even make you happier.

Remember there are different types of exercise like cardiovascular, stretching and weight bearing. Weight bearing exercise is important to support good bone health and stretching helps to keep our bodies limber and helps prevent falls.

Notice how exercise makes you sleep better, get around better and care for your grandchildren better. Find something you enjoy and make exercise a fun way to care for yourself.

Eat a Well-Balanced Meal

The five food groups each provide nutrients needed to keep our bodies healthy and functioning properly. Having a well-balanced meal is difficult while caring for others but is essential for taking care of you!

Grains provide us with energy and keep us regular. Make sure half of our grains are whole grains every day. Eating things like brown rice, quinoa, barley, or oats give our bodies the energy needed to keep up with the kiddos.

Fruits pack a lot of nutrients, vitamins and minerals into their sweetness while providing regularity and energy. Grains, Fruits, and veggies are all instrumental in preventing chronic diseases like heart disease and cancers. Vegetables are full of fiber and fiber is important for cancer and heart disease prevention.

Proteins from lean meats, beans and legumes support muscles and keep us full. Avoid high fat protein and try to eat lean protein like chicken and fish. Plant based protein like nuts, seeds, and beans are good for us as well.

Dairy provides us with strong bones and teeth from its calcium. It is recommended that you consume skim, fat free or low-fat dairy products. All milk products have the same amount of calcium they just don't have the same amount of fat.

At every meal you should try to get foods from all five food groups for a variety in your diet.

Yoga Classes in Cape May County:

Avalon Recreation Center - (609) 967-3066

Cape May City Recreation Department - (609) 884-9565

Cape May County Library - (609) 463-6350

Cape Regional Miracles Fitness in Rio Grande - (609) 886-7070

Lower Recreation Department - (609) 886-7880

North Wildwood Recreation - (609) 522-2955

Ocean City Aquatic and Fitness Center - (609) 399-6111

Teri's NJ Beach Yoga - (609) 602-3398



If you are interested in guided meditation to help with breathing and relaxing try:

<https://cih.ucsd.edu/mindfulness/guided-audio-video>

Caring for yourself and sleep go hand and hand

As we age sleep becomes shorter and may not be as restful. Finding ways to get quality sleep is important. When a person doesn't get a good night sleep the effects can take a physical and emotional toll and affect brain function. Check with your doctor if you experience poor or lack of sleep continually.

A good night's sleep improves our mood and makes us more aware while also supporting our memory functions. Good sleep can balance sugar levels because we tend to crave sugary foods when we are tired. Since our bodies slow down during sleep our heart rate slows too, it has been shown that this gives our heart a little break with pumping blood throughout our bodies.

There isn't an exact amount of sleep recommended, however, most adults need 7-9 hours per night. Babies sleep a lot because they are growing and developing, they might sleep 16-18 hours per day. School aged children need about 9.5 hours per night again because they are growing and developing but not as much as babies.

Usually after age 60 sleep becomes shorter, more interrupted by waking and a lighter type of sleep. People who are chronically sleep deprived could be more likely to be overweight, have a stroke, cardiovascular disease, infections, and certain types of cancers according to the National Institute of Neurological Disorders and Stroke. Still being studied is the relationship between Parkinson Disease, Alzheimer's disease, and sleep. While sleep may not be the easiest health goal to achieve the rewards are plentiful when carrying for yourself and others.

Start Small... Stress reduction, physical activity, sleep, and healthy eating are all good ways to take care of yourself, however they may be hard to do as you care for your grandchildren. Try picking one area to add in like going for a ten minute walk every day. Start slow and build up to bigger goals. Making changes to our lifestyles usually requires a six-week time span of regularly implementing the change. Don't give up on yourself if you miss a day of your walk, its okay try again tomorrow and keep in mind it may take some time to make healthy changes regular habits. Remember, anything you do to care for yourself is beneficial. Be kind to yourself so that you feel your best while caring for others.

Tips to Getting a better night sleep:

Go to bed at the same time every night and wake up at the same time in the morning. This can help with your internal clock. It will signal to your body that it's time to sleep. It may take a while to be effective, but it can help you get a more restful or complete sleep.

Exercise every day. Getting 20-30 minutes of exercise per day can help you sleep better and get more restful sleep.

Cut back or cut the caffeine including coffee, sodas, and energy drinks. This is especially true closer to bedtime. Try to not use caffeine for 2-3 hours before bed or removing it from your day if that doesn't help. Caffeine is a stimulant and too much will keep you from settling down at night.

Quit smoking. Nicotine is also a stimulant. When a smoker has a craving or urge to smoke, they are trying to feed the need for the addictive drug - nicotine. This need for nicotine creates a feeling of anxiety and when a person uses the nicotine it feels like the anxiety has been released when actually, the nicotine addiction has been filled. The craving for nicotine often wakes users during the night and quitting can provide a better night's sleep. If you do use nicotine like cigarettes, cigars or a vape and want to quit call Cape Assist at (609) 522-5960 for free smoking cessation and nicotine replacement therapy.

Drink less alcohol. Some people say they sleep better when they consume alcohol, but this too can cause interrupted or unsound sleep. Alcohol may interfere with our sleep stages causing restlessness or poor sleep. The dietary guideline for Americans recommends women consume only one drink per day and men two. Its best to make sure you are not drinking too much and too close to bed to get a good night's sleep.

De-stress. During the day take time to de-stress and find something to relax you. This might mean exercise or a hobby you enjoy and could involve meditation or breathing. Taking a break from all we have going on in the day will give you the ability to calm down or turn off better.

Unplug. Turning off your phone, tablet or computer can help with sleep. The blue light from these technology sources mimics daylight which can throw off our Circadian Rhythm causing poor sleep or lack of sleep. Try turning off your phone and tech items even ones you think might be relaxing you and spend some quiet time without technology. Avoid watching things on TV that may cause restless sleep right before bed and having stressful conversations that may make you restless as well.

Eat earlier. Don't eat a huge meal too close to bed. When our belly is too full it could cause digestion problems or overall discomfort so avoid eating a big meal too close to bedtime. Avoid drinking water too late in the day if you are getting up a lot to use the bathroom. Try consuming water earlier in the day to stay hydrated and healthy.

References:

- Brain Basics: Understanding Sleep. (n.d.). Retrieved November 10, 2020, from <https://www.ninds.nih.gov/Disorders/Patient-Caregiver-Education/Understanding-Sleep>
- Goldstein, A. N., & Walker, M. P. (2014). The role of sleep in emotional brain function. *Annual review of clinical psychology*, 10, 679–708. <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-clinpsy-032813-153716>
- Haghighatdoost F, Karimi G, Esmailzadeh A, Azadbakht L: Sleep deprivation is associated with lower diet quality indices and higher rate of general and central obesity among young female students in Iran. *Nutrition*. 2012, 28: 1146-1150. 10.1016/j.nut.2012.04.015.
- Liu, Y., Croft, J.B., Wheaton, A.G. *et al.* Association between perceived insufficient sleep, frequent mental distress, obesity and chronic diseases among US adults, 2009 behavioral risk factor surveillance system. *BMC Public Health* 13, 84 (2013). <https://doi.org/10.1186/1471-2458-13-84>
- Malhotra A, Loscalzo J: Sleep and cardiovascular disease: an overview. *Prog Cardiovasc Dis*. 2009, 51: 279-284. 10.1016/j.pcad.2008.10.004.
- Mounir Chennaoui, Pierrick J. Arnal, Fabien Sauvet, Damien Léger, Sleep and exercise: A reciprocal issue?, *Sleep Medicine Reviews*, Volume 20, 2015, Pages 59-72, ISSN 1087-0792, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.smrv.2014.06.008>, (<http://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S1087079214000720>)
- MyPlate Plan. (n.d.). Retrieved August 17, 2020, from <https://www.choosemyplate.gov/resources/MyPlatePlan>
- Patel, D., Jewell, E., Rhodes, A.. Mindfulness Activity Guide for Adults, Publication number: EC-09
- Physical Activity Guidelines for Americans, 2nd ed.; U.S. Department of Health and Human Services: Washington, DC, USA, 2018. Available online: <https://www.health.gov/paguidelines/second-edition> (accessed August 11, 2020)
- Otto, Michael W et al. “Exercise for mood and anxiety disorders.” Primary care companion to the Journal of clinical psychiatry vol. 9, 4 (2007): 287-94. doi:10.4088/pcc.v09n0406
- NIH Osteoporosis and Related Bone Disease National Resource Center. *Exercise for Your Bone Health*. Retrieved August 11, 2020, (2018, October) from <https://www.bones.nih.gov/health-info/bone/bone-health/exercise/exercise-your-bone-health>
- U.S. Department of Agriculture and U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. Dietary Guidelines for Americans, 2020-2025. 9th Edition. December 2020. Available at DietaryGuidelines.gov.
- Wei, M. (2018, October 17). Self-care for the caregiver [web log]. Retrieved November 30, 2021, from <https://www.health.harvard.edu/blog/self-care-for-the-caregiver-2018101715003>.



For more information about the Grandparents Raising Grandchildren Support Group, visit our Website: <http://capemay.njaes.rutgers.edu>

Follow us on Facebook @FCHSCapeMayCounty

The **GRANDparents Connection** is published for grandparents raising their grandchildren.

The **Grandparents Raising Grandchildren Support Group** and all of Rutgers Cooperative Extension’s educational programs are offered without regard to race, religion, color, national origin, gender, sexual orientation, or disability.

Rutgers Cooperative Extension Cape May County
355 Court House – South Dennis Road
4 Moore Road, DN 703 (mailing address)
Cape May Court House, NJ 08210
(609) 465-5115 Ext. 3609

Editor: Chris Zellers, MPP
Family and Community Health Sciences Educator/
Assistant Professor Department of Family and
Community Health Sciences
Rutgers Cooperative Extension of Cape May County

If you would like to be removed from our mailing list, please call (609) 465-5115 ext. 3609.

Cooperating Agencies: Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey, U.S. Department of Agriculture, and Boards of County Commissioners. Rutgers Cooperative Extension, a unit of the Rutgers New Jersey Agricultural Experiment Station, is an equal opportunity program provider and employer.