

LIFE IN **BALANCE**

Your guide to healthy living.

Easing the ‘Sandwich Generation’ Squeeze

With the growing number of Baby Boomers living longer lives, there are many that feel “sandwiched” between the pressures of caring for an older parent, as well as raising and supporting children. If this sounds familiar, it could be because it’s quite prevalent today.

This group, known as the “Sandwich Generation,” is people who are juggling the roles of caring for their own families (including minor children) and aging parents at the same time. The emotional, physical and financial strains experienced by those in the Sandwich Generation can be overwhelming.

To help ease some of the strain while caring for older parents, it is important to make advance care planning if not already in place. Having a plan will make it easier for everyone to ensure requests are honored. Also, self-care for the caregiver is essential.

The first step in making advance care decisions is to learn as much as you can. This increases knowledge, gives peace of mind, advises health care providers, and (most importantly) helps prevent disagreements among family members.

A lack of advance care planning has personal and economic consequences. Family members may not know what is desired, as well as getting care that was not wanted can lead to unnecessary medical expenses for treatment, hospital stays, and long term care.

However, what is also critical is for those “sandwiched” to feel less squeezing in the middle, by taking care of yourself. This can mean eliciting help from other family members,

utilizing community resources, setting boundaries, and taking time for respite (mini vacation, activities, spending time with friends).

To learn more about advance directives, you can request a free copy of “Advance Care Planning Kit” by contacting the Aspirus Customer Contact Center from at 800-847-4707. You can also discover and learn more about coping with being one in the “Sandwich Generation” by contacting Aspirus EAS. We are here to help.





Genetic Test Identifies Best Antidepressant

Imagine easily knowing the exact medication that is right for your body. According to results of a study at the University of Michigan, it's possible. Patients with a major depressive disorder, in whom initial antidepressant therapy failed, did better when their medication selection is guided by genetic testing.

In the University of Michigan's Comprehensive Depression Center study – the largest-ever study of its kind – patients with depression that did not improve, were more likely to respond to treatment and more likely that the depression did not return when their medication selection was guided by the GeneSight psychotropic genetic test. The GeneSight test combines personal DNA with medication information to shorten improvement time.

The testing can be quite easy. DNA samples are taken with cheek swabs, which are sent to a laboratory. Results are returned in 36 hours in the form of a color-coded chart indicating drugs to avoid, those to use cautiously, and those that are not associated with any known genetic problems and/or are recommended for the patient. The executive director of the University of Michigan's Comprehensive Depression Center in Ann Arbor, Mich., said that this test can help spare the physician and patient from “riding through weeks” of an antidepressant trial only to fail.

One very helpful use of the test was for patients taking anti-depressant medications that didn't really help and may have made things worse. In this study, all outcomes were significantly improved among those who changed to medications that fit with their genetic makeup. The use of genetic testing to help determine antidepressant treatment for patients is something that the field has been working towards for a long time. And now, is becoming more available. But, the best news of all is that it's easy, accessible, and is showing excellent results for those taking medication.

– Information from Medscape Psychiatry news was used in this article.



Dog Sense is Extraordinary

Your furry pooch can save your life in a number of ways. Some pup owners claim their pets have alerted them to bad guys, helping them avoid risky situations; especially if the owner-pet bond is quite strong.

According to Jennifer Nelson, a former groomer, the main explanation is that dogs use their sense of smell to detect chemical changes in the pheromones produced by the human body, indicating their bad intentions. Pups can smell the chemistry changes in the brain of a person who's acting aggressively, leading them to react protectively.

What's more, a dog can also sense a human's increased heart rate and anxiety. Most dogs are very protective of their human companions, so they tend to be on extra-alert, especially with strangers and in new environments.

– Excerpts from: "The Most Amazing Things a Dog Can Sense Before They Happen," by Mark Reed – Dogs Breeds Center

GROW

Your Social Network for Good Health

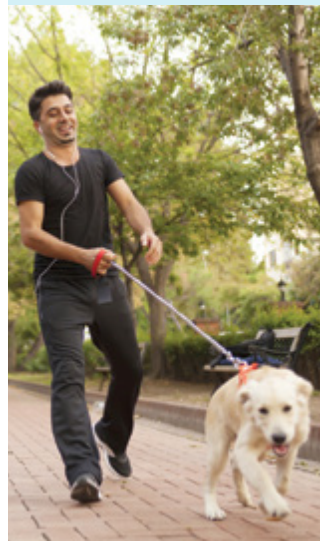
July is Social Wellness Month. It's time to get out and nurture your social relationships. Social wellness is taking care of yourself and nurturing your relationships, and also the ability to give and receive social support.

It is important to have someone that you can trust, family and/or friends, to turn to in times of adversity for needed support. Social wellness is also essential to maintaining good health, both mentally and physically.

The health risks from being lonely or secluded from other people are comparable to the risks associated with cigarette smoking, high blood pressure, obesity, depression and cognitive decline. Here are a few suggestions to help build your social network:

- Try working out with a friend, take an exercise class or become a member of a gym.
- Get out and take a walk with your pet. It is a great way to meet your neighbors.
- Start a hobby or join a club, which will allow you to meet new people, who have similar interests.
- Reach out to others by volunteering. Your local United Way agency is a great place to start volunteering.

– Adapted from PubMed Central at the U.S. National Institutes of Health's National Library of Medicine.



Gizmos, Gadgets and Tablets...Oh My!

Technology is at our fingertips nearly every second of our day. It can be great for efficiency and entertainment, but what is all of this technology doing to our bodies? Prolonged use of devices can adversely affect our health. There is concern for the effects of technology use on our posture, dangers of the light emitted from devices, hindering relationships due to poor communication and contribution to sedentary lifestyles.

Two concerns with gadget use on our bodies are text neck and kyphosis. Text neck is the idea that prolonged and repetitive forward tilt of the head during texting puts a tremendous amount of force on the neck. Science shows that the angle of the head tilt held while texting is approximately 60 degrees and 60 pounds of pressure on your cervical spine. Kyphosis is the extreme curvature of the thoracic spine. This posture resembles rounded shoulders or hunched back. Sitting in a chair for prolonged time can cause this postural deviation due to forward curve of the shoulders or slouching in a chair. This is a concern largely for our youth, and adults with sedentary desk jobs and video gaming. We can minimize postural complications by making sure to take time away from screens.

Many screened devices emit blue light, short waves from the visual spectrum that come from electrical devices. Blue light can reduce melatonin, a hormone produced in the body that helps control your sleep-wake cycle. When our body's melatonin production is interfered this can lead to poor sleep, which affects energy levels. In children, excessive blue light exposure may delay their ability to function their fullest in school; affecting grades, and extra-curricular activities.

According to the American College of Sports Medicine only 27 percent of students accumulate 60 minutes of physical activity daily. The Center of Disease Control and Prevention recommends 60 minutes of physical activity for all children daily to provide optimal growth and health. Putting devices down and embracing entertainment in the form of physical activity can be beneficial. Playing in organized leagues, group fitness classes or a more active gaming program, such as Pokémon Go, Wii or Kinect may be healthier alternatives.

You can practice screen freedom regularly with your families by promoting screen free family gatherings. A growing trend is creating a "gadget box," where you check your technology at the door. Having dinner as a family has many benefits, but adding device free dining to your meal can make conversations flourish, mindful eating and relationships become stronger. Adopting screen free time and promoting movement may help improve statistics on relationships, your sleep cycle and spinal injuries. I challenge you to put down your devices. Make time for activity and relationships. Adopt screen free behaviors.

Sources: American College of Sports Medicine Position Stand on Physical Activity in Youth and Adolescence

Center for Disease Control and Prevention

Environmental Health Perspectives, 2010 DOI:10.1289/ehp.118-a22

Text-Neck Syndrome- Systemic review. Imperial journal of Interdisciplinary Research 2017



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Confidential Helpline

800.236.4457

Counselors available 24/7

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