

Aging Well: Make the Investment Now

Groucho Marx once said: "Age is not a particularly interesting subject. Anyone can get old. All you have to do is live long enough."

Aging well, in contrast, is an entirely separate art that involves planning, getting clear on your own definition of the "good life" and self-care.

Making these investments in your life now can yield a life that continues to be satisfying, rich and active... well into your "golden years."

Lifestyle

Say the word "retirement" and images pop up like post cards: hammocks, gardens, more time for hobbies, motor home at the Grand Canyon, spending more time with your family, finally seeing Paris. If you're still in the planning stages for retirement, note that the key word here is "plan."

Ask yourself several questions like these: Would I like to live closer to family or the ski slopes or the tropics? What have I always longed to do? How will retirement affect my monthly budget? When you have the answers, ask yourself: What do I need to do now to prepare? For example, find a financial advisor, project a budget that includes inflation, figure out the cost of travel.

Of course, despite your planning, there's always the unexpected. While you may not be able to prepare for every situation, the very act of thinking through what you want from life and what's important to you will help you weather challenges with greater ease.

Health

Eating good food, getting out in the sunshine every day, healthy sexuality and being active are key ingredients to aging well.

Mental health is another consideration. From menopause to sleep

issues, depression to caregiving, getting proper support for your emotional and psychological well-being is an important, but often overlooked, factor in aging well.

Exercise, of course, is a large part of taking care of your body, emotions and mind. The National Institute on Aging (NIA) reports that "people with arthritis, high blood pressure or diabetes can benefit from regular exercise. Heart disease, a problem for many older adults, may also be alleviated by exercise." Plus, exercise is a proven mood-lifter and a great way to socialize!

Money

Finish this sentence: You can never have enough _____. If you said something besides money, you're on the right track. Especially if it's something you plan on being, doing, or having in the future. But if you did say money, you're on the right track as well. That goes double if you're a bit fuzzy on how much money you need in order to retire or how much you've been investing into your retirement savings every month.

Financial preparation is another key to aging well. In addition to meetings with your financial advisors, consider regular meetings with your loved ones to communicate about your estate planning and end-of-life decisions. While facing the subject may feel taboo or awkward at first, you'll likely discover that these meetings enrich your relationships.

Golden Plan for Golden Years

Of course, there are many other factors to aging well, but the point is to think now, and maybe even daydream a bit, about the road ahead. With thoughtful preparation, your "golden years" truly can last the rest of your life. *

10 Practices Supporting Talk Therapy

Therapy can be a vital part of healing. To get even more benefit from your therapy experience, consider adding one or all of these 10 practices to your life:

- 1. Physical self-care.** A healthy diet helps you clarify your thinking and be more present in therapy. Exercise helps relieve mild to moderate depression so that you can confront challenging issues.
- 2. Meditation.** Sitting with your thoughts can increase your capacity for insight and self-awareness.
- 3. Support groups.** Groups provide continuity between sessions and often help clarify your issues.
- 4. Bodywork.** Treatments such as massage and Reiki can bring to consciousness buried feelings and traumas stored in the body.
- 5. Artistic/creative pursuits.** These soul-nourishing activities promote healing by opening access to wiser places inside.
- 6. Dream tracking.** Dreams bring up unconscious or semiconscious material that you and your therapist can work with.
- 7. Affirmations/positive self-talk.** Such practices can boost your self-esteem and the confidence you'll need to confront issues.
- 8. Relevant reading.** Books and articles provide context for the work you're doing with your therapist.
- 9. Volunteering.** Helping others who are struggling can increase your compassion for and tolerance of your own struggles.
- 10. Time in nature.** Being in nature can bring a sense of peace and appreciation that promotes healing. *

A Letter From

Mary Ann Spwood



It's a fact of life that we all age. Some of us find it easier to accept any resulting limitations, while others are more distressed by them. The cover story explores a few of the challenges that people face as they grow old, and also shows how you might learn the art of aging well.

Old or young, many of us compare our bodies against an unrealistic ideal and judge what we see in the mirror. That poor body image then affects us in many ways. The article on page 3 explores some of those harmful effects and also offers a strategy for loving yourself again.

Asking for what you want and setting boundaries is another way to love yourself, and is an important life skill. But sometimes we're afraid that our assertion will alienate our partners—or we forget that honoring requests is a two-way street. The article on page 4 offers a way to get your needs met while enriching your relationship at the same time.

Also in this issue is a quiz, which asks if you are living a life of your own choosing or simply meeting others' expectations. And, finally, the Top 10 offers practices that can support your healing in therapy.

Enjoy this issue of the newsletter. If you have questions about any of the articles or would like to set up a counseling session, please don't hesitate to call Pathways at 815-398-7483.

May this season bring you greater self-acceptance, clear communication and improved relationships.

Are You Living Your Own Life?

Fulfillment in life is related to how well you are living in alignment with what's truly important to you. Do your decisions emerge from the essence of who you are—not from who you think you should be? Take this quiz to see how well you are living a life that is of your own making.



True False

- 1. I have spent time thinking about what's important to me, and I can articulate those things.
- 2. While I have been influenced by my parents, teachers, society and other outside forces, I have not simply adopted their values and beliefs. My own values and beliefs come from deep inside, and I express them in all areas of my life.
- 3. I am not easily swayed by the opinions of others. I know my own mind.
- 4. In order to remain open and flexible, I am willing to re-examine my opinions and beliefs to determine whether something is still true for me. I am interested in other points of view.
- 5. My spouse/partner is a good match for me. We share in a way that pleases me and have an ideal amount of separate space. We don't have to agree on everything.
- 6. I chose my occupation, or choose to remain in it, because it most closely utilizes my skills, strengths and passions.
- 7. I also choose my friends. I don't go along with a friendship that doesn't feel right just because that person pursued me.
- 8. Any spirituality I practice feeds my soul.
- 9. I have aspirations. I spend time thinking about them and taking action toward those that are most important to me.
- 10. Anyone looking at my life from the outside would see the things that I value.
- 11. When I'm sick, or a family member is sick, I listen to the appropriate health care provider. If something about the advice doesn't feel right, I get a second opinion.
- 12. On the rare occasion when I let someone break a boundary or persuade me to do something I don't want to do, as soon as I'm aware of it, I take steps to stop and correct the situation.
- 13. Living life on my own terms doesn't mean I never compromise. It means that I *choose* when to compromise.
- 14. Following the path that others laid out for me might have brought me more money or acclaim; however, I have no regrets because I chose every step along the way.

*If you answered false more often than true, you may wish to clarify what is truly important to you and then find ways to bring your life into greater alignment with those values. Please don't hesitate to call if you'd like support in doing this. **

Mirror, Mirror on the Wall

How Your Body Image Could Be Harming You

Do you ever have thoughts like these?

1. My life would be better if I looked better.
2. I will never look as good as _____.
3. My _____ is/are so ugly.
4. I am so fat.
5. That scale/size can't be right.
6. I look disgusting; no one could ever love me.

If you do, you're not alone. Numerous studies and surveys show that up to 80 percent of American women are dissatisfied with their appearance. Women aren't the only ones with poor body images; recent studies indicate that men are becoming increasingly bothered as well.



Body image is not just a problem of being unhappy with what we see in the mirror, but also that our perception of what we see is skewed. For example, a University of Colorado study showed that the same women who overestimate the size of their waists by 25 per cent were still able to correctly estimate the width of a box.

We also have unrealistic expectations of what we should be seeing in the mirror, thanks to the mass media's portrayal of "ideal" body types and other physical features.

A Three-Legged Stool

So, body image is really a three-legged stool that wobbles (and sometimes knocks you right over) when you:

1. Feel dissatisfied or unhappy about how you look
2. Have a skewed perception of how you actually look
3. Have unrealistic expectations of how you should look

As you can imagine, the more wobbly your stool, the more deeply these body image issues are going to permeate your life. Poor body image can lead to eating disorders, depression, substance abuse and other serious problems.

Even when it doesn't seem to be having an impact on your day-to-day life, if you take a closer look, you may find that your body image is an underlying cause of issues in virtually every area of your life.

Personal relationships. When you're preoccupied with body image, you may sacrifice quality time with friends and loved ones. For instance, you refuse to go

to the beach or pool because you don't want to be seen in a bathing suit.

Romantic relationships. When you're feeling bad about the way you look, you might create distance between you and your mate (e.g., you say no to intimacy) or a potential mate (e.g., you don't talk to new people).

Workplace success. Confidence is attractive in the workplace as well. Even though your physical appearance has nothing to do with your job performance, your level of self-esteem does.

Self-care, health and wellness. If you're not feeling good about yourself, you may not be motivated to take good care of yourself.

Finances. How much money do you spend on the pursuit of a better body? Could that money be better spent?

Spiritual. When you're focused only on your appearance, you have little time, money or energy to cultivate a spiritual life, help others or contribute to the greater good.

Home. You may reflect your poor self-image in your outer environment by letting clutter build up or neglecting house repairs or cleaning.

5 Ways to Love Yourself Again

1. Spend time every day on your self-care, hobbies, friendships and spiritual interests. These will fill you up in ways that a "perfect 10" body never will.

2. While looking at yourself in the mirror, affirm your appreciation for all of your positive qualities, skills and traits.

3. Groom and dress yourself lovingly every day. Choose clothing that fits well, in colors and styles that you like.

4. Aim for a body size that is healthy for your height and shape. Speak to a doctor or dietician so that you have a realistic goal.

5. Focus on creating a healthy body and let your weight take care of itself. Try limiting the frequency that you step on the scale.

By acknowledging the impact of body image on the rest of your life, you can refocus your lens and keep a healthy view of what you see. *



How to Be Assertive Without Alienating Your Partner

Asking for what you want—and setting boundaries around what you don't want—is a key life skill. But sometimes in our enthusiasm to practice this skill, we over-do our own assertiveness and end up with a partner who shuts down, gets angry or feels resentful. Here are four tips for developing your assertiveness in a way that will actually strengthen, deepen and enrich your relationship—thus avoiding the “alienation trap.”

Get Clear

Being assertive starts with knowing what you are—and aren't—willing to be, do, or have. For many of us, coming to this knowledge is a real task unto itself. Here, it may be useful to ask: “In an ideal world, what would I like to happen?” Focusing on an ideal outcome opens our minds, prevents us from falling into passivity or “victim-thinking,” and helps us get really clear on what we want and don't want.

Set Boundaries

Once you know what outcome you need (or want), share it with your

partner. Pay attention to the way stating your boundary feels in your body. With practice, you can actually sense when you're hitting the “sweet spot.” It can feel really pleasurable, even exhilarating, to express your needs or desires out loud. Phrases like “such and such doesn't work for me” are simple ways of being assertive while maintaining connection with your partner.

Make a Regular Habit of Stating Your Needs and Desires

You can build your assertiveness the same way you build any muscle: exercise. Practice speaking up about your needs, big or small, on a daily basis. When you speak up about things that are less controversial—such as where to go to dinner, requesting help unloading the dishwasher or what TV program to watch—both you and your partner get used to your assertiveness. It becomes easier for you to practice



and for your partner to hear. Also, when bigger issues come along, you and your partner will have a healthy process in place for dealing with differences in needs, and you'll have greater confidence in the resilience of your partnership.

Give as Much as You Get

Assertiveness is a two-way street. If you want your boundaries to be respected, you must return the courtesy to your partner. If she doesn't want you to use the bathroom when she's in the shower, don't. If he asks you to give him a half an hour after work before you talk and connect, respect that. When it comes to following through on a partner's reasonable request, actions really do speak louder than words.

If your partner isn't respecting your boundaries even though you've set them clearly, it may be time for professional help for you and/or your relationship. *

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