Finding Balance Supports Well-Being

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Balance

Equilibrium

Stability/Steadiness

Evenness - no ups and downs

Harmony
* What do we do when things get out of balance?

We try to do something different, rearrange our priorities
Finding the Right Balance

* Finding balance is really a lifelong task
* Aging presents some unique challenges
* Life events that throw us off balance
* Suggest some ways to adapt to those changes, re-balance one’s life, and restore a sense of well-being
* What is well-being?
  * Sense of contentment, fulfillment, and satisfaction
  * Seems to depend on balance among the various aspects of one’s life
Physical

Emotional

Cognitive

Well-Being

Environment
* Changes in family dynamics
  * Children leave home (or children return home)
  * Retirement
  * Loss of spouse
* Temporary or chronic health problems
  * Self
  * Loved one
  * Caregiving responsibilities
* New living arrangements
  * Restructuring or redesigning a home
  * Downsizing, i.e., moving
  * Retirement village
  * Living alone

Precarious balance
Adapting and Re-Balancing

* Be Active
  * Exercise physically
  * Keep active mentally
  * Engage in cognitively-stimulating activities
  * Get out and about
  * Volunteer
  * Try new things
  * Take it slow
  * Reduce stress
  * Take care of yourself
Supportive relationships are a strong predictor of well-being (Myers, 2003)

They can
- be a source of positive affect
- provide meaning in our lives
- reduce stress
- provide practical support
Social engagement has been found to be related to longevity, resilience in the face of adversity, better overall physical health, and reduced risk of dementia (Cohen & Wills, 1985; Holt-Lunstad et al, 2010, 2012)

Social isolation has been found to increase the risk of dementia by as much as 60% (Fratiglioni, 2000)

There is an increased probability of becoming socially isolated with age
We did two studies looking at whether:

a) Emotionally positive memories tended to include more social experiences than self-focused experiences, and

b) Increasing social interaction in older adults who lived alone would provide cognitive benefits
Literature indicates that as people get older they tend to seek out and focus more on positive emotional experiences—what has been called the positivity effect (Carstensen et al, 2006).

We were interested in whether one’s positive emotional experiences were derived primarily from social interactions and whether this would be reflected in their autobiographical memories.

Polsinelli et al, 2015
Compared older adults (N=45, age=76.8) to younger adults (N=25, age=18.6)

People were asked to freely recall memories of personal events that had happened to them in the past 3 years but were at least one month old

* 3 positive memories and 3 negative memories

Memories were recorded and later analyzed for content in the following way:

* Individual (i.e., self-focused) or social (interpersonally-focused)

* “I” pronouns or “she, he or they” pronouns
Older adults positive memories were more socially or interpersonally focused, had less I-talk and more third-person pronoun use.
Older adults derive positive emotional benefits from events that involve social and interpersonal interactions.

Their negative memories, on the other hand, tended to be less social and more self-related.

These findings are consistent with the view that social interactions support emotional well-being in older adults.
Some evidence that people who are socially engaged have better cognitive function

We wanted to look at whether increasing social interaction could help to maintain or even improve cognitive function with age

We wanted to reach people who might be socially disengaged

Could online social networking such as Facebook be used to connect socially isolated older adults, and would that provide cognitive benefits?
*Three Groups*
  * Facebook (n = 13, age = 79.4)
  * Penzu       (n = 13, age = 78.4)
  * Waitlist    (n = 14, age = 79.3)

*Interventions*
  * 6 hours of training over a week
  * 7 weeks of daily postings in Facebook or Penzu

*Tests* of working memory/executive function, processing speed, and event memory were given before and after the Facebook/Penzu interventions.

For the most part, these people lived alone

Myhre et al., 2014
Everyone was able to learn how to use these computer programs, and make two postings a day on their own for 7 weeks.
* Changes in Working Memory (Updating)

The Facebook group showed a significant increase in performance compared to no significant change in the other two groups.
Both Facebook and Penzu groups showed increases in processing speed following the intervention compared to the Waitlist group. No differential slowing for Trails B across groups.
There appear to be specific cognitive benefits associated with using Facebook

Only the Facebook group showed improvements in working memory

This cognitive benefit could be attributable either to the greater social interaction required by Facebook or to the cognitive demands of Facebook relative to Penzu

Facebook may have required greater working memory than Penzu

Face-to-face social interactions require working memory just as online conversations do
Social engagement, whether it occurs face-to-face or through online social media, improves working memory in older adults.
* It allows people who are truly socially isolated to stay connected, increasing the likelihood that they will challenge and maintain their cognitive function

* It allows people who are experiencing cognitive decline to continue social interactions at their own pace

* It allows people who may be experiencing hearing problems to remain socially connected

* Ultimately, it may allow older people to stay in their own homes for a longer time, connected to a social support system, and able to function relatively independently.
Stay Engaged!

Ivy Bean, 104 years old, has 4,000 friends on Facebook

Osher Lifelong Learning Institute

Annual Conference on Successful Aging 2013
* Social interactions contribute significantly to older adults’ positive life experiences and emotional well-being, and are also the source of improved cognitive function
* Balancing Social Interaction with Self-Reflection

  * Find time for yourself
  * Consider mindfulness
*Focusing attention on the present moment
*Blocking out distraction
*An acceptance of things as they are
*Withdrawing attention from stressful situations, past or future
*Calming the mind and staying in the moment
*Mindfulness can be enhanced through meditation
Mindfulness Meditation

* Has at least 2 components:
  * Focused attention, which involves focusing on breathing, on an object, or your body
  * Open monitoring, which is sort of a calm, non-judgmental awareness or openness to experience

* Mindfulness meditation has been shown to increase attention, decrease stress and depression, and increase life satisfaction.

* Thus it has the potential to enhance both cognitive and emotional well-being
Major lifetime changes or adverse events that occur as we age can throw us off balance, disrupt our lives, and leave us unhappy and unfulfilled.

To restore that balance and achieve a renewed sense of well-being, we need to:

- Try something new
- Seek out positive social interactions
- Find time for self-reflection and mindfulness
THANKS!

Balance is the Key to Life
Thank You Supporters!