



Our Maturing Path of Well Being: Aging Well as a Psychologist

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CPA's Colleague Assistance and Support Program (CLASP) has been around for years, historically providing support for California psychologists "on that continuum from wellness to crisis." With our current emphasis on wellness, I would like to focus on the relationship between physical and emotional health as we grow older. We well know that mind and body are intricately intertwined. Stress, depression and other mental states are known to have an impact on the development and course of disease and illnesses that manifest themselves with increasing frequency as we grow older. I look to enjoy my twilight years. However, I also know that the pressures of work and life have already affected at least the course of my physical health.

We tend to work as psychologists well into our senior years. We have much to bring to our profession. Experience and maturity most often adds to our effectiveness. The comfort and the security that may come to us with the years of experience can reduce the stress of work. However, frequent long hours, economic stressors, and the pressures that tend to go along with working with those with mental disorders can take their toll. Adding to the usual need for leisure activities and timely vacations, I have found myself needing to plan for a progressive decrease in activity level.

As I have begun to think about this eventuality, I have started asking myself whether I am going to take care of my emotional and physical health and to adapt effectively as my needs change. Staying healthy takes more effort and focus now. In many ways, I seem to be less concerned about issues related to professional advancement and recognition. I am less responsive to colleague opinions and feel more confident in my skills and own professional convictions. On the other hand, I find I can't work late anymore. It is difficult to remain alert. My best hours are definitely in the morning.

Time is no longer infinite. I find myself thinking in finite terms. "I'll likely live only twenty more years, though maybe 30 if I'm lucky." I now think in terms of what I still want to do in this time. Goals need to be accomplished within five, ten, fifteen years rather than a lifetime - my previous perspective. I keep thinking that I really don't have to go anywhere fast any more. This means that I can enjoy my time as I have not before.

Old age and infirmity are not infrequently found together. Isolation and loneliness often accompany aging. As we grow older so does our spouse or partner. Their health and mood may at some point be compromised. Death of a partner may come expectedly or unexpectedly, exacerbating one's own sense of loss and bereavement.

No less than in younger years, a good diet, exercise, quality medical care and enjoyable activities and companionship are essential for a sense of well-being. Desires for intimacy and sexual satisfaction do not disappear although modifications in frequency and function may well emerge. Often the type of exercise favored earlier in life (like jogging, skiing and energetic water sports) may not be appropriate. But frequent walking, swimming, water aerobics and "tai chi" are activities that can provide for the very necessary exercise of one's body. Research supports this perspective. Physical activity seems to actually decrease depressive affect.

Keep in mind that a sense of well-being involves many factors at all stages of life. As in earlier years, successful aging includes the ability to feel contentment, enjoy life, be resilient, self-realized, respond flexibly, be balanced, well-rounded, have the ability to care for self and others, and maintain self-confidence and self-esteem. As in every other stage of life, these goals need to be included in our life's plan as we age.



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CPA's Colleague Assistance and Support Program (CLASP)

Cultivating and Sustaining Wellness and Resiliency

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- Check out our website at: www.cpaclasp.org
- Join our I&R at no cost and become a provider to work with other psychologists.