

Lily's Blog

Category: Be Well

Advice to Grads is Timeless

My oldest graduated high school this year. If you haven't reached this milestone with your kids, nieces or nephews, the experience is an emotional rollercoaster on so many levels. Of course there's the "where did the time go?" realization and the vivid memories of the first day of kindergarten that you swear was just last year. What surprised me was, between the emotional swings of pride and joy in who he's become and bitter sweet sadness at the thought of him moving to college in the fall, I found myself remembering my own high school graduation. Those inspirational speeches to the class of 2016 with their whole life ahead of them to do whatever makes them happy, gave me pause. What have I done since that milestone in my own life? Am I doing what makes me happy?

I started asking some of the other moms in my son's class if they were doing what makes them happy. What I learned is that like me, most of them had been so consumed with "life" and the stress that comes with managing family, work, and home that they couldn't remember the last time they even thought about being happy.

The Happiness Quotient

The science of happiness continues to be a compelling research topic as more people, particularly women, are being treated for depression. According to a study published by the [Stanford Graduate School of Business](#), how happy we are in general is based on a three variables:

1. Set Point – our happiness level determined by birth or genetics is believed to account for 50% of our happiness
2. Life Circumstances – like marital status, and income, account for 10% of our happiness
3. Activities – things **we choose to do** accounts for **40% of our happiness level**.

So, in short, we have the ability to control 40% of what makes us happy. That's great news! But like the working moms at my son's school, do we even **know** what makes us happy?

[Research](#) suggests that too much stress for a sustained period of time, in other words, life circumstances, can contribute to depression. After literally decades of being on the hamster wheel of life management, no wonder we don't know what makes us happy, and many of us are suffering from depression.

It's Never Too Late to Do What Makes You Happy...

For most of us in the healthcare profession, helping others really does make us happy. When we take the time to reflect back on our career choice, this is what drew many of us to the profession. For most of us with new graduates, raising our children has made us happy too. Still, for our own health and well-being, it's important to take time on a regular basis to ask ourselves, "is what I'm doing making me happy?" If you don't know the answer, or you don't think you are as happy as you could be, you might want to consider taking one of the [many](#) online [assessments](#).

When you figure out what makes you happy, you owe it to yourself, and to the world to pursue it. It won't be as easy as it was when you first graduated, but it is possible. You can still go out and conquer the world, help cure cancer, or simply learn to play piano. You just have to take the first step.

So, what's your next step going to be? Put it in writing. Share it. That's what makes it more than a wish. It makes it a goal.

Resources:

<https://www.psychologies.co.uk/test-what-makes-you-happy>

<http://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/2014/nov/11/-sp-questionnaire-what-job-would-make-you-happiest>

<https://faculty-gsb.stanford.edu/aaker/pages/documents/ThePsychologyofHappiness.pdf> **

<http://www.webmd.com/depression/features/stress-depression>

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The Quest for Sleep and Other Mid-Life Mayhem

If sleep is nature's elixir, menopause, and perimenopause are a "super bug." Everything we read lately tells us that getting sufficient sleep every night is essential for a healthy mind and body. It's as critical as food and water. Sleep impacts mental functioning, including hunger triggers, metabolism, physical stamina, our immune system and probably dozens of other things that have yet to be proven.

So why is it that insomnia is such a common symptom of menopause and perimenopause? The short answer is that the hormonal changes that are going on in our bodies are creating as much havoc as puberty did. We have the same mood swings, but instead of greasy hair and skin, we have the joys of hot flashes, night sweats and insomnia. I personally believe the mood swings that take us from compassionate caregiver to raging lunatic in the blink of an eye have more to do with sleep deprivation. I'll gladly trade the insomnia for greasy hair and skin any day.

Taming Insomnia and Other Menopause Demons

Hormonal therapies can help some of the symptoms of menopause and may be the best option particularly if your symptoms are really severe. The risks and benefits are something every woman should discuss with her doctor to decide what is best for her.

I tend to be a "natural girl," so when my insomnia and night sweats started really becoming a problem, I looked to natural options to help me manage them.

Vitamin D

Vitamin D supports bone health, cell growth and hormone balance. But, as we age, our bodies have a harder time absorbing Vitamin D. So, when my symptoms started, I made sure I got my 15-20 minutes of daily sun exposure (with sunscreen of course) whenever possible. I also included more Vitamin D rich foods in my diet. Fish like tuna and wild salmon as well as eggs and dairy products like milk can all help boost Vitamin D levels.

Exercise

My most effective weapon against insomnia, and mood swings is exercise. Mindful breathing and stretching in yoga really relaxes my mind and body. Aerobic and strength training helps increase my endorphins and relaxes me so at bed time, I'm ready to fall asleep and stay asleep. It also helps keep my metabolism moving to help with the never-ending battle of the bulge.

Getting a Good Night's Sleep

Practicing all of the regular good sleep habits have helped too. I don't drink caffeine after noon, and I keep my bedroom cool, dark and quiet when I'm ready to go to sleep.

Menopause and all of its symptoms are a natural, if not uncomfortable part of life. I know I'm just beginning this life transition, but I've found a way to manage the symptoms that has made less disruptive.

How about you? What tips and tricks have you discovered to make this life change easier to manage?

<http://www.webmd.com/menopause/guide/emotional-roller-coaster>

<http://www.healthline.com/health/menopause/alternative-treatment#Yoga8>