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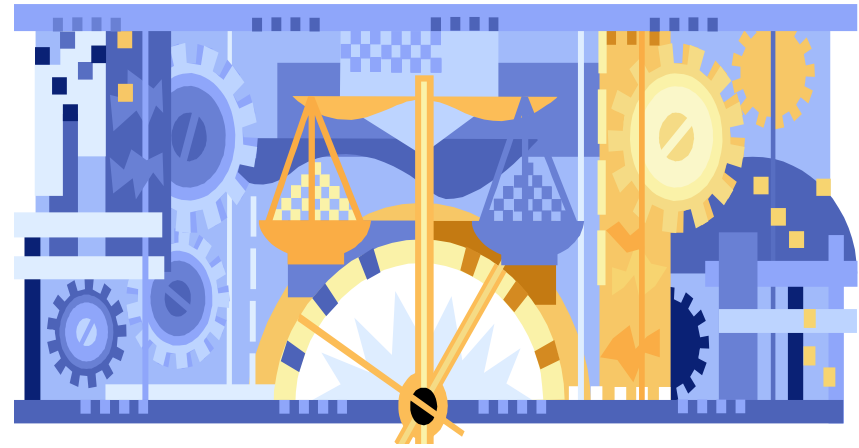
# Optimizing Resilience: What Can We Do?

# Balance leads to resiliency

- Balance—stressful things happen in older adulthood
  - Caregiving
  - Widowhood
  - Social isolation
- But there are ways that we can capitalize on resiliency.

# What is stress?

- Stress occurs when the demands of our world
  - exceed what we believe are our capabilities.



# Caregiving

- The multiple daily stressors from caregiving is associated with greater circulating levels of inflammation (Gouin et al, 2012).
- Older caregivers have poorer responses to vaccines (Glaser et al, 2000).

# Stress reduction techniques

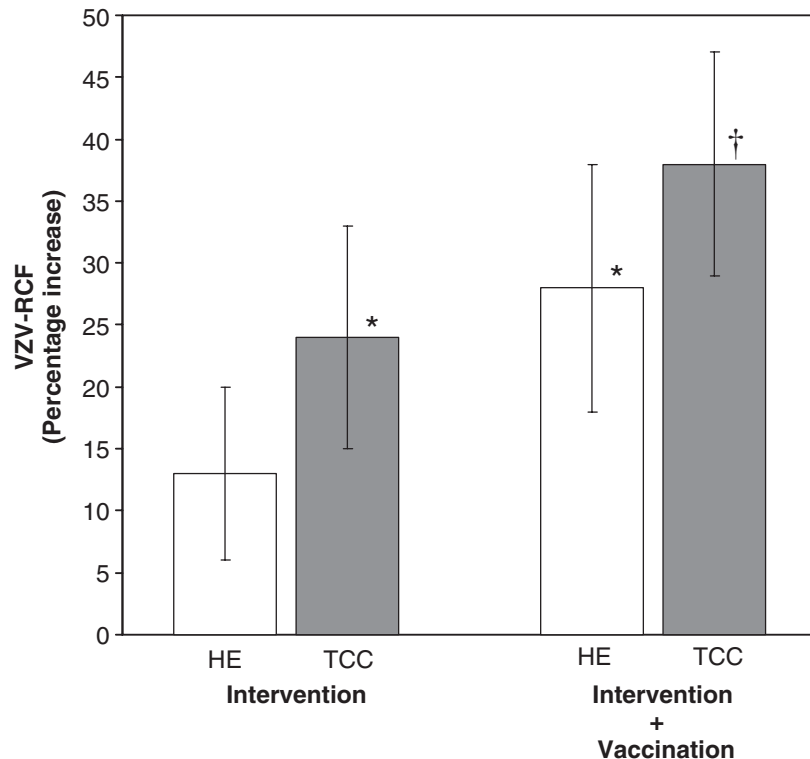


- Fortunately, while the causes of stress can be difficult to remove from one's life, the impact of stress can be reduced through various stress reduction techniques.

# Support is essential

- Support is not just something that is given
- It is something that is requested.
- Support groups for caregivers are effective in improving the care receivers' symptoms (Sörensen et al, 2002).

# Tai Chi and vaccination



- Tai Chi incorporates aerobic activity, relaxation and meditation.
- 16 weeks of Tai Chi before a shingles vaccine showed a more effective immune response.

Irwin et al, 2007

# Widowhood

- The risk of death or illness increases after the death of a loved one—the “widowhood effect”.
- It is important to continue to think of physical health during bereavement.



# Sleep disruption

- Sleep disruption is normal during bereavement.
- Sleep medications are not effective in the long-term, and can be very difficult to discontinue.
- A regular sleep schedule (especially for waking) and exercise is more important.

# Anticipatory Grief

- Can be very intense in caregivers
  - A balance of relinquishing ties and “letting go” of a spouse, while remaining engaged in caregiving
- Can feel powerless in the face of a continually progressing disease
- Can include strong feelings of anger

# Not all bad

- Anticipatory grief can lead to reductions in acute grief after a loss
- Many former caregivers experience a feeling of relief, even when they feel guilty about it
- Anticipatory grief may provide a chance to work through some grief or create acceptance

# Grief: the transition after caregiving.

- Part of resilience is being able to grieve and adapt to a new life.

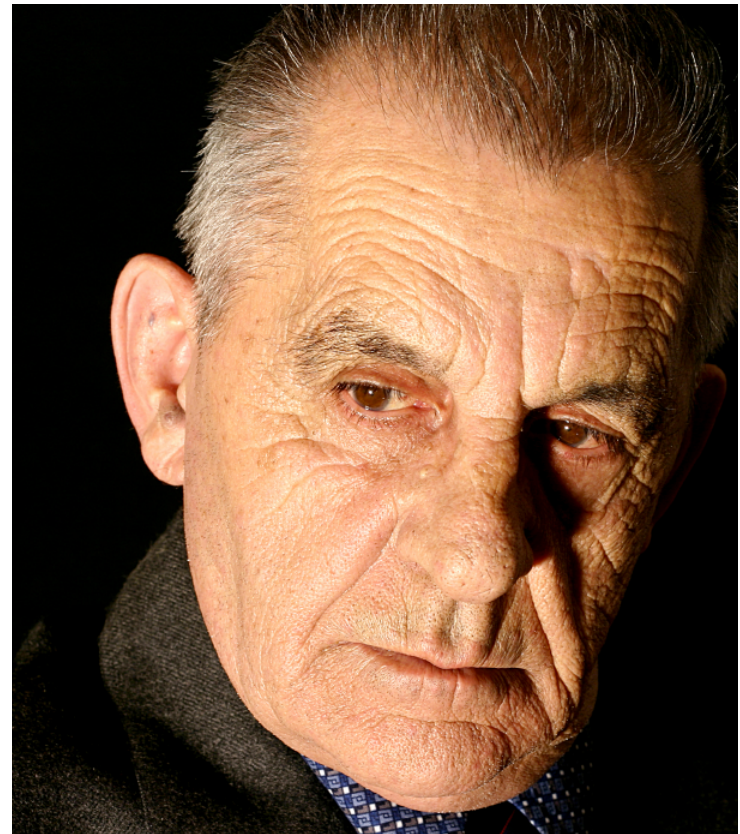
# Dual Process Model of Grief



FIGURE 1 A dual process model of coping with bereavement.

# Social isolation and loneliness

- Feelings of loneliness are associated with increased mortality risk (Luo et al, 2012).



# Stress and depression

- Stress and depression can be a vicious cycle
- If you find it difficult to reduce your stress, seek help from a mental health professional



# Watch out for depression

- Have you dropped many of your activities and interests?
- Do you feel that your life is empty?
- Are you afraid that something bad is going to happen to you?
- Do you often feel helpless?
- Do you feel pretty worthless the way you are now?
- Do you feel that your situation is hopeless?

Geriatric Depression Scale



# Suggestions for daily life changes

1. Ask for support.
2. Take care of your physical health.
3. Get involved in activities and hobbies that fully engage you, that are both challenging and absorbing.

# Get involved in activities & hobbies

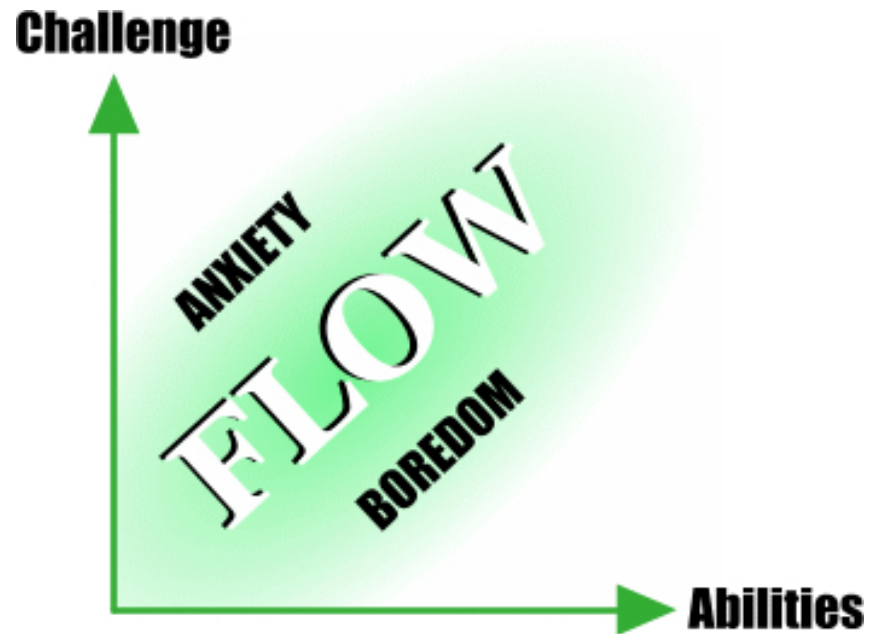
In order to achieve a state of flow, there are three conditions:

1. goals are clear
2. feedback is immediate
3. a balance between challenge and ability

“Flow: The Psychology of Optimal Experience”  
by Mihalyi Csikszentmihalyi

# What is “flow”?

- Flow is not the same as “spacing out” or passive leisure activities.
- It is sometimes called “being in the zone”.



# Examples of flow activities

- Chess, mahjong or bridge
- Playing piano or guitar, singing in a choir
- Contra-dancing or folk dancing
- Photography or painting
- Knitting, crocheting or quilting
- Video games, puzzles, crosswords
- Gardening

# Summary

- Stress is caused by a variety of events, including caregiving, widowhood, and social isolation.
- Fortunately, the impact of stress can be reduced through various stress reduction techniques.
- We can make changes every day that will influence our future health!



# Successful Aging

The best advice for successful aging—

*—is to pick the right parents  
and be very lucky!*

Bill Ittelson, UA Emeritus Professor