HEALTH & WELLNESS
VANDERBILT FACULTY & STAFF
The Occupational Health Clinic
Health *Plus*
Work/Life Connections - EAP
Connection
Providing programs that support the well-being and productivity of Vanderbilt's most valuable asset... YOU!
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April, May 2021

Growth & Beauty in Difficult Times

Jim Kendall, LCSW, CEAP
Manager, Work/Life Connections-EAP

"April showers bring May flowers" reminds us that there can be growth and beauty even in difficult times. Through the difficulties of 2020, our mental well-being has been challenged, and we have learned to be resilient.

5 insights gained from a year of beauty amongst adversity:

1. **Self-care:** Remember to recharge, connect with others, and create daily routines. It's important!
2. **Time with family:** Virtual learning and working remotely provide opportunities for interaction outside of the usual hustle and bustle. Take pleasure in the small things, like having lunch with a loved one and give yourself grace in the times of struggle.
3. **Gratitude, appreciation, and hope:** Appreciate the people in your life, feel gratitude for the small things (like toilet paper!), and look for hope on the horizon (e.g. new COVID vaccine and treatments).
4. **Be intentional:** Enjoy simpler pleasures such as nature walks, gardening, new hobbies, and quiet time.
5. **Be open to new ways of doing things:** Embrace the positive changes in your work and home life. Working remotely, using new technology and flexible schedules may contribute to greater balance.

As you continue the uncharted course through adversity, slow down. Stop and smell the roses watered by the April showers. May you nourish your psychological growth and mental well-being.

Care Gap Alerts

COVID-19 Pandemic

Meg Benningfield, MD
Associate Professor of Psychiatry & Behavioral Sciences and Pediatrics
Director, Division of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry
Vanderbilt University Medical Center

How has the COVID-19 pandemic affected our mental health?

In this past year, we have experienced unprecedented loss. At the same time, our typical rituals for coping with grief have been disrupted. Furthermore, the pandemic has created a situation of uncertainty that is more intense and has extended for longer than any of us have ever experienced. This prolonged uncertainty may be the most challenging aspect in terms of our mental health.

What are the signs and symptoms of pandemic-related anxiety?

Uncertainty often causes us to feel on edge, nervous, even fearful. Anxiety can make it difficult to sleep and may cause us to be more irritable. It may be hard to focus or concentrate. We may experience disruptions in digestion, headaches, or significant muscle tension.

Are there coping mechanisms that I can use myself or with my family?

A good place to start is by accepting how challenging our circumstances continue to be. Taking a few mindful moments each day to focus our attention on present circumstances without judgment can be helpful.

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Work/Life Connections-EAP

The Counselor's Corner

Rosemary Cope, LPC, CEAP

Maintaining Your Mental Health is Essential

Maintaining your mental health during a pandemic is a worthy goal. We are missing hugs, getting together with family and friends, concerts, and socializing in ways we could prior to the onset of the coronavirus. It is normal to feel stressed and even overwhelmed from time to time during times of change and uncertainty.

When you traveled in the past, the airline attendant always gave these instructions: If the plane hits turbulence and the oxygen masks come down, place a mask on yourself first before turning to help others. This is critical. If we don't, we may not be able to help anyone. We have hit that turbulence, and we all need to practice the best self-care possible.

David Mosher, Assistant Professor in Psychology at the University of North Texas, encourages self-care in this way:

1. Practice emotion-based coping. Here is the good news about emotions: Emotions are momentary. Emotion-based coping strategies help you stay upright through the emotional waves by matching your actions to your feelings. When you are sad, melancholy, or depressed, try something slow and soothing. What if you are angry, frustrated, or restless? Then you can try cleaning your house or cranking up loud music and dancing. Discharge your tension with some laughter by watching a funny video.

2. When anxiety is gripping you, try calling out your worries by saying them out loud or breathing and placing your hand on your heart to measure your heartbeat. Regarding anxiety with COVID-19, try noticing your thoughts without judgment, attuning to how these thoughts impact your being and your breathing as they inevitably fade with time.

3. Notice the unhelpful thoughts that do not give you vitality (e.g., What will happen tomorrow?).

4. Help someone else. Focusing efforts to help other people cultivates better emotional health. Given the COVID-19 precautions that limit contact, helping may look a little different, such as calling to check in on a friend, sending encouraging texts, or sending uplifting videos to others. Altruism reminds us of the good in humanity and why we prosper in a healthy community.

I Am Vanderbilt celebrates the people of Vanderbilt and the unique talents and contributions they bring to their work at the University each day.

I Am Vanderbilt

Midori Lockett

Midori Lockett has been involved in community service and outreach since she was a teenager. That's one reason she finds her current role as chief community impact officer in Vanderbilt's Division of Government and Community Relations especially meaningful.

Lockett directs Vanderbilt's Community Impact Fund, the university's charitable contribution program. "My role is outward-facing, results-oriented, and collaborative," she said. "I facilitate Vanderbilt's community engagement goals through relationship building. Overall, my job is to make meaningful connections on behalf of Vanderbilt and to effect positive change in our local community."

A Vanderbilt staff member for two decades, Lockett has previously held positions in the Office of the Chancellor, Commencement, and Human Resources. She said dedication to the university's mission and higher education in general and commitment to doing good work are among the qualities she appreciates most in her Vanderbilt colleagues.

"I take pride in making connections between community partners and campus ones and seeing those relationships evolve and grow," she said. "It is also rewarding to provide resources to organizations that are doing impactful work, especially in marginalized communities that have historically been under-resourced.

"Seeing that real change can be achieved is important to me," she said. "With intentionality, collaboration, and commitment of resources, you *can* facilitate impact."

Despite the challenges of the past year, Lockett has found some personal upsides. "A major positive was having my children home during the fall term," she said of her twin son and daughter. "They both attend college in other states, so it was fun to see them in class and learn more about their coursework. They are both so smart and talented!"

A self-described introvert, Lockett maintains her wellness by taking walks in her neighborhood, doing deep-breathing exercises, and practicing mindfulness. "I value quiet time and introspection," she said. "We are inundated with information, and sometimes you must tune out and enjoy the still and quiet."

– Kara Furlong

Occupational Health Clinic **talk:**

Let's Get Moving!

Angela Wells, MSN, APRN, FNP-BC
Nurse Practitioner, Occupational Health Clinic

Every year on the first Wednesday in April, the American Heart Association (AHA) sponsors National Walking Day. To observe this day, people of all ages get outside to take a 30-minute walk and remember the health benefits of increasing physical activity. During this time of a pandemic and with warmer weather right around the corner, it couldn't be a better time to get ourselves moving.

According to the AHA, the many health benefits to increasing our physical activity include the following:

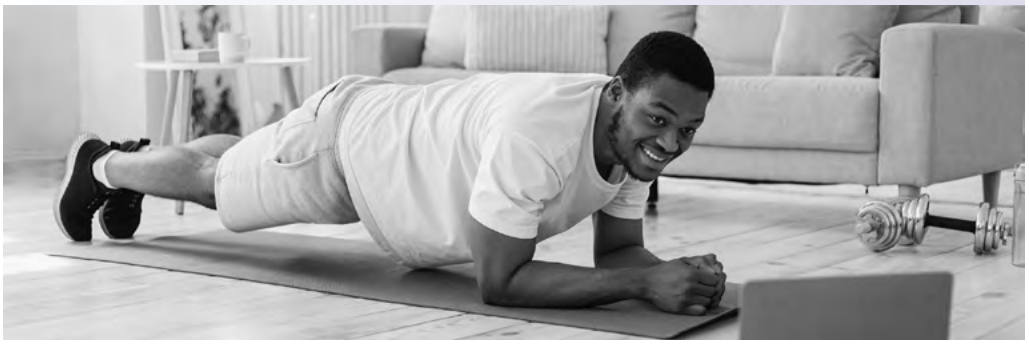
- Lower risk of heart disease, stroke, type 2 diabetes, and high blood pressure.
- Less weight gain and lower risk of some complications of pregnancy.
- Better sleep and fewer symptoms of depression and anxiety.
- Improved cognition, including memory, attention, and processing speed.
- Better bone health and balance, with less risk of injury from falls.
- Better quality of life and sense of overall well-being.

Dr. Cristina Kline-Quiróz, who practices cancer rehabilitation at VUMC and is an assistant professor in the Department of Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation, states, "Exercise is important for all adults. Exercise can lower the risk of several types of cancers, and for those with cancer, exercise has a positive effect on health outcomes including fatigue, physical function, anxiety, and depression."

It is recommended in the *Physical Activity Guidelines for Americans* that adults get at least 150 to 300 minutes a week of moderate-intensity exercise, or 75 to 150 minutes a week of vigorous-intensity aerobic physical activity. Preferably, aerobic activity should be spread throughout the week.

If you need to stay home and exercise, then make it interesting and carve out some space just for exercise. Try to get outside as much as possible and consider adopting a walking buddy — coworker, friend, or family member. (Remember to wear your masks if walking together!) If you decide to start walking on your breaks, here is a link that will provide you with information about the walking routes: **vumc.org/health-wellness/news-resource-articles/walking-routes-campus**.

We hope everyone can find their own ways to take advantage of the many benefits of exercise! And remember, log in to the Health & Wellness Information Portal (HWIP) to complete your Health Risk Assessment and receive a personalized fitness report. Go to **bit.ly/healthplushra**.



Care Gap Alerts

COVID-19 Pandemic

(continued from page 1)

Maintaining social connections in a safe way, healthy eating, and regular physical activity have also been shown to enhance our resilience in high stress circumstances.

How will I know if I should discuss this with my or my family's primary care physician (PCP)?

When anxiety gets out of control, it can actually increase our risk for physical illness including infection. If you find that you are unable to unwind or shut your thoughts down, or if you are experiencing feelings of hopelessness or worthlessness, it's a good idea to reach out. Disruptions in sleep, eating, or energy levels are other signals that it may be time to seek some help. Finally, the pandemic has been associated with an increase in thoughts of suicide. If you begin to wonder if it's really "worth it," remember that you are not alone. You can seek help from your doctor or contact the national suicide prevention lifeline **suicidepreventionlifeline.org** at **1.800.273.8255** or by texting TN to 741741.

Carpe Annum! — Seize the Year!

6 Keys to a Re-energized 2021

It's time for your third key action to re-energizing in 2021. In the last issue, we covered the second key: Get Active. In this issue, we focus on: Be Smoke-Free!

6 Keys to an Energized Year!

- Eat for Energy
- Get Active
- **Be Smoke-Free**
- Get Enough Sleep
- Live with Less Stress
- Work Toward a Healthy Weight

You Can Be Smoke-Free!

Quitting smoking during a pandemic might seem impossible, even outrageous. But did you know big transitions can be a good time to work on new habits and set aside old ones? If quitting smoking is something you would like to do, **you can**! Remember that it's never too late to quit. Your body begins to heal within minutes of your last cigarette — and it won't take long for you to notice.

Take the first steps in quitting tobacco today:

Make the decision to quit.

The decision to quit smoking is one that only *you* can make. Think about why you want to quit. Write down your reasons so you can look at them every time you want to smoke.

Set a quit date and make a quit plan.

Pick a date within the next month to quit. There are many ways to quit, such as nicotine replacement therapy, prescription drugs, and other methods. The Quit Rx program offers counseling and treatment services, including medications when recommended. Call the Occupational Health Clinic at **615.936.0955** to schedule an appointment.

Get support.

Support from friends, family, coworkers, and programs can increase your chances of quitting for good. Health *Plus* offers one-on-one lifestyle coaching to support smokers in quitting. Go to **bit.ly/healthpluscoach** for more information.

Can't-Miss Health *Plus* Activities in April and May!

Active in April

Get creative and get Active in April with Health *Plus!* Visit **bit.ly/healthplusaia** for activity details.

Employee Health & Fitness Month

Join Health *Plus* in celebrating Employee Health & Fitness Month this May! Visit **bit.ly/healthplusfitmonth** for activities details.

Stretch Breaks

Every Wednesday from noon to 12:30 p.m. on the Plaza in April and May! Visit **bit.ly/healthplusmindful** for details.

Ask a Lifestyle Coach

Q How can I stay motivated with my goals?

Rachel Bowman, CHES
Health Educator, Health *Plus*

A Even under the best circumstances, it can be tricky to stay motivated with goals. It doesn't matter how big or small your goal is. Understanding your motivators will help you with long-term success. The best motivators will be personal to you and will help you stay connected to your goal, even when life gets tough.

Motivation has natural highs and lows, so consider these 5 tips to stay motivated!

To get started with Lifestyle Coaching, complete the registration form at **bit.ly/healthpluscoach**.

HEALTH *PLUS*
NUTRITION CORNER

Learn about a different nutrition topic each month to support your health. With tips and delicious recipes, Nutrition Corner makes healthy eating simple!

April — Benefits of Breakfast

May — Fueling Your Workout

Enjoy this recipe from April's Nutrition Corner:

Spinach and Prosciutto Frittata Muffins

Serves 6

Ingredients:

- Non-stick cooking spray
- 6 large eggs
- 1/2 cup milk
- 1/4 teaspoon salt
- 1/8 teaspoon pepper
- 3/4 cup crumbled soft goat cheese
- 5 ounces chopped and wilted baby spinach
- 1/2 cup diced roasted red pepper
- 2 ounces prosciutto, sliced into ribbons

Directions:

1. Preheat oven to 350°F. Spray 12-cup muffin pan with non-stick cooking spray.
2. In large bowl, beat eggs, milk, salt, and black pepper. Stir in cheese, spinach, and roasted red pepper.
3. Divide batter among muffin-pan cups (about 1/4 cup each), top with prosciutto and bake 20 to 25 minutes or until just set in the center.
4. Cool on rack 5 minutes, then remove from cups. Serve warm. Can be refrigerated up to 4 days; microwave on high 30 seconds to reheat.

Nutrition Information per Serving: (2 egg muffins) Calories 155 | Total Fat 10g | Saturated Fat 4g | Sodium 520mg | Carbohydrate 4g | Fiber 1g | Protein: 13g

Adapted From: **https://www.goodhousekeeping.com/food-recipes/easy/a42206/spinach-and-prosciutto frittata-muffins-recipe/**

Log in to Nutrition Corner in April and May for these great topics and more delicious recipes. Go to **bit.ly/healthplusnutritioncorner**.

Reminder to Submit Your 2020 FSA Expenses

Remember to submit your 2020 FSA expenses if you still have funds remaining in your 2020 health care and/or dependent care flexible spending account (FSA). While eligible expenses for use of those funds must have been incurred January 1, 2020, through March 15, 2021, the deadline to file claims for reimbursement for those expenses is **April 15, 2021**. **Please file your claims for reimbursement on or before April 15, 2021, or you'll lose funds remaining in your 2020 FSA.**

WHAT TO DO NEXT

To check your FSA balance in My VU Benefits:

- Log in with your VUnetID and password.
- At the bottom of the page are **Helpful Links**.
- Click on **View My Reimbursement Account**.
- In the **My Accounts** box on the left side, look for the balances for **2020**.

While in My VU Benefits, if you need to determine if an expense is *eligible* for reimbursement:

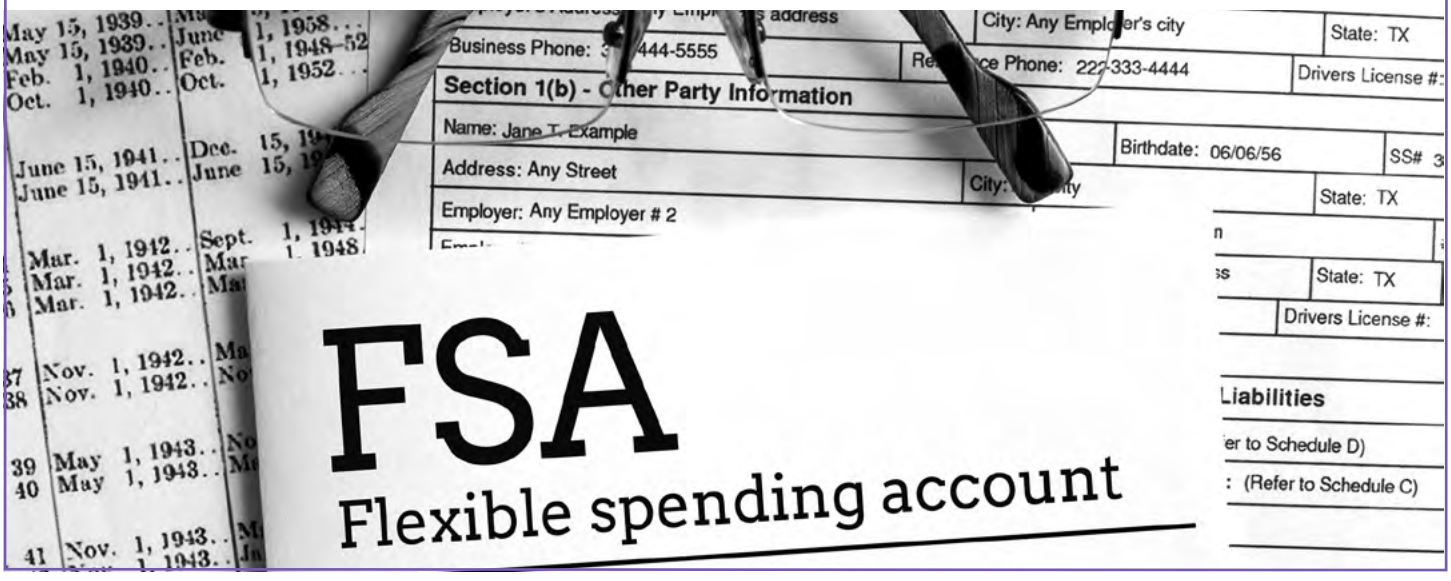
- Go to the **Resources** drop-down list at the top of the page, and
- Click on **Find Eligible Items**.

To submit your claims by April 30:

1. Go online to My VU Benefits, log in and then scroll to the bottom of the page and click on "Reimbursement Tools."
2. A pop-up window will appear. Click on **Open**.
3. You will be taken to the Flexible Spending Account Reimbursement Request Form.
4. Print it out and fill it in with your eligible claim information. Take copies of the receipts associated with the claims you are submitting on the form.
5. Fax the form and receipts to BenefitExpress at **253.793.3766**.
6. OR scan your completed form and receipts to **help@mybenefitexpress.com**.

Need help or have questions?

- For help with your BenefitExpress account or claims, contact BenefitExpress at **help@mybenefitexpress.com** or 877.837.5017.
- If you have general questions about the flexible spending account program, contact Human Resources at 615.343.4788 or **benefits@vanderbilt.edu**.



upcoming events

Know Your Numbers

Go to **bit.ly/healthpluskyn**
for digital options.

Active in April

Go to **bit.ly/healthplusaia**
for activity details.

Babies & You

Go to **bit.ly/healthplusbabies**
for updated scheduling.

Employee Health & Fitness Month

Go to **bit.ly/healthplusfitmonth**
for activities details.

Healthier You Presents

Go to **bit.ly/healthplushealthieryou** to
view monthly presentations.

Stretch Breaks

Go to **bit.ly/healthplusmindful** for
weekly stretch break details.

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Let's Get Moving! with Angela Wells, MSN, APRN, FNP-BC

Ask a Lifestyle Coach with Rachel Bowman, CHES

Correction: In a previous article, *The Mediterranean Diet: Now That's Amore!*, we should have stated that *The Nutrition Source* states that interest in the Mediterranean diet started around the 1960s, when it was noted that individuals in the Mediterranean region experienced "low rates of chronic disease and higher than average life expectancy despite limited access to health care."

Have a topic you want to see covered? Email us at **health.wellness@vumc.org**.

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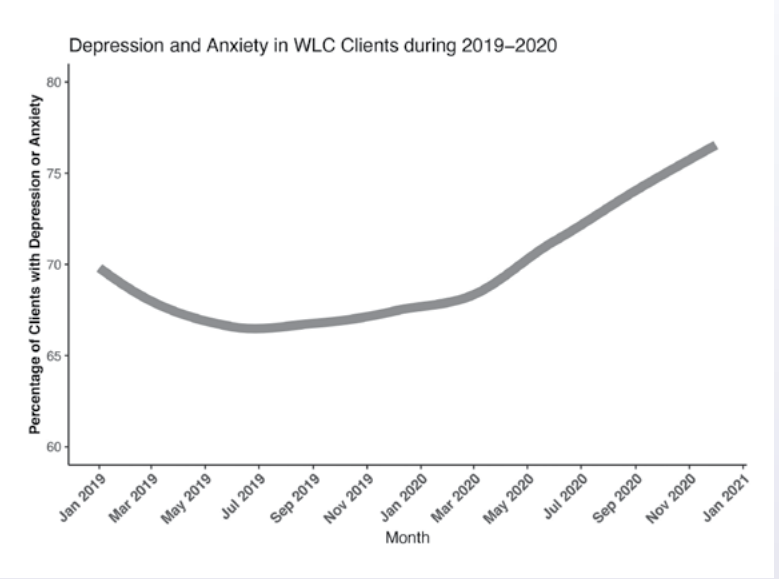
The Healthy Pulse

FOR FACULTY AND STAFF AT VANDERBILT



Depression and anxiety are the most prevalent mental health concerns when faculty and staff present to our Work/Life Connections-EAP counselors. Work/Life Connections-EAP (WLC) has developed brief, anonymous and confidential self-assessment questionnaires including depression, anxiety, stress, post-traumatic stress, and others.

Access the online screening tools at the WLC website (**bit.ly/wlcscreening**) or by signing on to the Health and Wellness Portal (same location as the new "Go for the Gold" site).