Weathering Change

It’s been said that the only thing unchanging in life is change itself. As we age, we often face a large number of beginnings and endings: retirement (self or spouse), moving, caregiving, illness or loss (self, spouse, family members, or friends), financial limitations, and social circles, to name a few.

The words change and transition are often used interchangeably, but they’re different. Change happens when something starts or stops, or when something that used to happen in one way starts happening in another. It can happen all at once, or over time. Transition, on the other hand, is a three-part process involving your thoughts and feelings. The three phases in transition are: (1) letting go of the old situation and of the old identity that went with it; (2) going through a disorienting time of feeling both loss and hope where your place between old and new realities feels unclear; and (3) making a new beginning—not merely a “fresh start”—where you learn to think and plan with new purposes and priorities.

Learning to adapt to changing situations can reduce stress. But adaptability is more than responding to outside forces. Equally important is the ability to take charge of life situations. You can practice this the next time you’re faced with a difficult situation: write down the things you can control in one column and those you can’t in the other. List all the action steps you can take to address items listed in the “you control” column. Keep a running log of what worked and what didn’t so you can refer to it next time.

The longer you live, the greater the chance that you will outlive your spouse and long-time friends. It’s important to stay in touch with friends—and make new ones. A social network of friends of all ages ensures help in times of need. Regular social contact can also reduce your body’s stress response. Researchers have found that retirees with at least 16 people in their social networks report more satisfaction with their lives. People attract relationships must often by having a positive outlook and a sense of humor. Make a commitment to volunteer in the community, participate in clubs or member-oriented activities, chat with neighbors, move closer to family members, or simply call people more often. Having regular contact helps build important bridges for the future.

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Someone’s In The Kitchen

Do too many cooks spoil the broth? “Never!” say members of Dietary Change Group 295 at the Worcester Clinical Center. The participants enjoyed making black bean soup in their clinic’s demonstration kitchen, and many planned to make the recipe again at home (without quite as much help, though!).

Low-Fat Bites

- **Want to save money on microwave popcorn? Make your own!** Simply pour 1/4 cup of unpopped corn kernels into a paper lunch bag. Fold the top over twice to seal. Place the bag in the microwave oven and heat on high for three minutes or until the popping stops. It makes six, fat-free cups. Three cups of popcorn equal one grain serving.

- **Fat-free cheeses are easier to use when chilled or frozen.** They slice and grate best when the grater or knife/slicer is first sprayed with non-stick cooking spray. Fat-free cheese melts best when placed under the toppings in any recipe.

- **You want dinner, and you want it now? Keep your freezer stocked with Stouffer’s Lean Cuisine Skillet Sensations, a line of frozen meals that takes just 15 minutes to prepare in a skillet. Varieties such as Beef Fajita, Beef Tertiyaki and Rice, Chicken Oriental, Chicken Primavera, and Smokey Turkey sell for about $4.69.** Each serving contains two to seven grams of fat and one serving of vegetables.

- **Send someone you care about something good for them—like juicy oranges, tangy grapes, or crisp apples. Fruit baskets/boxes make healthy holiday gifts.** Many companies sell such wares through magazines or the internet, and the produce is usually first-rate. Grocery store produce departments can also create fruit baskets for local giving and receiving.

- **Keep reading the nutrition labels of packaged foods you buy, even if you stay with the same brand, because some food manufacturers are changing their fat-free products to low-fat.** Consumers want healthful food with better flavor, so the food companies responded by adding more fat. For instance, **Healthy Choice has replaced their fat-free cheeses with a low-fat line.** The new cheeses have 1.5 grams of fat or less per serving. **Nabisco’s SnackWell cookies and crackers have more fat now, too.** While still low-fat, the Zesty Cheete and Cracked Pepper crackers have 50% more fat per serving. SnackWell cookies have 20% more fat. Some fast-food restaurants also increase the fat in menu items occasionally, so keep asking for nutrition information.

*The information in this section is not an endorsement by WHI of specific food products.*
Chicken Stew with Parsley Dumplings

Vegetable cooking spray
1 cup chopped onion
3 carrots, cut into 3/4-inch pieces
1/2 cup sliced celery
3 cups reduced-sodium chicken broth, divided
1-1/2 cups boneless, skinless chicken breast halves, cut into 1-inch pieces
1/2 - 3/4 teaspoon dried sage
1/2 cup frozen peas
2 tablespoons finely chopped parsley leaves
5 tablespoons flour
Salt and pepper, to taste

Parsley Dumplings (recipe follows)

Spray large saucepan with cooking spray; heat over medium heat until hot. Sauté onion, carrot, and celery for 5 minutes. Add 2-1/2 cups chicken broth, chicken, and sage; heat to boiling. Reduce heat and simmer, covered, until chicken is cooked and vegetables tender, 10-15 minutes.

Stir peas and parsley into stew; heat to boiling. Mix flour and remaining 1/2 cup chicken broth; stir into stew. Boil, stirring constantly, until thickened, 1 to 2 minutes. Season to taste with salt and pepper.

Spoon dumpling dough into 6 mounds on top of boiling chicken and vegetables (do not drop directly in liquid). Reduce heat and simmer, covered, 10 minutes. Simmer, uncovered, 10 minutes longer.

Parsley Dumplings:
3/4 cup all-purpose flour
1 teaspoon baking powder
1/4 teaspoon salt
1-1/2 tablespoons vegetable shortening
1/3 cup 2% milk
1 tablespoon finely chopped parsley

Combine flour, baking powder, and salt in small bowl. Cut in shortening with pastry blender until mixture resembles coarse crumbs. Stir in milk to make a soft dough; stir in parsley.

Makes: 6 servings
Fat: 5 grams
Fruit/Vegetables servings: 1-1/2 per serving
Grain servings: 3/4 per serving
Recipe from: Skinny Comfort Foods by Sue Spitler
Died-and-Went-to-Heaven Chocolate Cake

Preheat oven to 350°F. Lightly oil a 12-cup bundt pan or coat it with nonstick cooking spray. Dust the pan with flour, invert and shake out the excess.

In a large mixing bowl, whisk together flour, white sugar, cocoa powder, baking soda, baking powder and salt. Add buttermilk, brown sugar, eggs, oil and vanilla; beat with an electric mixer on medium speed for 2 minutes. Whisk in hot coffee until completely incorporated. (The batter will be quite thin.)

Pour the batter into the prepared pan. Bake for 35 to 40 minutes, or until a cake tester inserted in the center comes out clean. Cool the cake in the pan on a rack for 10 minutes; remove from the pan and let cool completely.

Icing:

1 cup confectioner’s sugar
1/2 teaspoon pure vanilla extract
1-2 tablespoons skim buttermilk or 2% milk

In a small bowl, whisk together confectioner’s sugar, vanilla and enough of the buttermilk or milk to make a thick but pourable icing. Set the cake on a serving plate and drizzle the icing over the top.

Makes: 16 servings
Fat: 5 grams per serving
Grain servings: 1/2 per serving
Recipe from Eating Well Magazine, March/April 1995
When Alice Hadwin headed to France for a two-month vacation last year, she didn’t say, “Au revoir” to her WHI eating plan. Instead, like most challenges in her life, she planned ahead and sought support from her peers. In a country famous for its rich foods, Alice passed up the croissants and stayed on course with her WHI goals.

At the time, Alice was an avid cheese lover and was worried about the challenges her trip might pose to her eating plan. “Before I left for France,” the Jacksonville participant recalls, “my WHI group was on the unit that looked at how to get ready for vacations and things like that. When I told Nancy Simhand, who’s in charge of our group, about my vacation plans, she suggested we use them for a case study for discussion. The other women were so terrific and gave me ideas. Lara coached it for me when she said I would be so interested in ‘seeing’ the scenery and the activities around me, I probably wouldn’t even have any appetite.’

Indeed, Alice’s follow-up postcard to her Dietary Change group confirmed the success of their ideas. It read: “Hi, Sisters and Nancy: What’s it like to be a WHI member and vacation in France in the heart of Roquefort country? Wonderful!!! Thanks to you all! I think, of you each time I want to fall away from the right path and though I am trying to help on our statistical reports, I am also grateful for the added push you gave me on ways to handle being in the lap of cheese, cream, butter, etc! I won’t be able to be with you for awhile, but think of you and look forward to returning to the group. Oh, yes—the best news is all the fresh fruits and veggies!”

A year later, cheese is no longer even a challenge for Alice. “With the exception of a little Roquefort, I don’t even eat it anymore,” she says. Along with her WHI eating pattern, she has adopted the French way of cooking with plenty of fresh vegetables. She is also thankful that she can enjoy baguettes, slender loaves of French bread, that are made without fat.

Alice had a friend who once took part in a heart study at the University of Florida. “I really respected her for doing that,” she says. “I thought it was a terrible way to have a lasting impact on other people’s lives and the direction of medicine.” Alice was thrilled to join WHI and loves her Dietary Change group. “It’s nice to have a group with such a common goal,” Alice says. “It’s a very helpful, supportive environment, and thereby adds to the rewards I experience within the discipline of the program.”

Her Dietary Change group has also served as a sounding board for issues that many women face as they age: experiencing loss, caring for elderly parents, and coping with personal or spousal illness. “It prepares my mind for more limitations because I haven’t known a lot of them in my life,” reflects Alice.

Alice believes it’s important to plan ahead and talk about how to cope with transitions and crises whenever possible. She has experienced many such transitions in her own life—“Some have been easy and some are not so easy”—and she thinks that it helps to put oneself in charge. “If I want something solved or need contact, I start thinking, ‘Well, what can I do about it?’ There is a lot of freedom we don’t use.”

The cheese counter was tempting, but Alice filled her kitchen counter with heart-healthy choices.
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Your Dietary Change group has a lot to offer besides support for the WHI eating plan. It provides those much-needed friendships, and a regular means for meeting with those friends. It may become a "peer support group," where issues facing other women your age can be discussed ("How can I find a nursing home for my mother?" or "My husband's been diagnosed with prostate cancer"). Even if such topics aren't of concern to you now, they may be issues you'll need to prepare yourself for in the future. Lastly, in a time of change, we're often comforted by the things in our lives that are constant and stable. Your WHI group could be that touchstone in your life.

When faced with times of change or transition, it can be hard to juggle a lot of responsibilities. You may be tempted to cut everything out in an effort to simplify your life. Even things you want to do—like staying in your WHI Dietary Change group—may seem hard. The good news? When it comes to staying in the study, it's not an all-or-nothing deal. We, of course, want you to stay in the study and participate fully. After all, you are irreplaceable and your efforts will make the study results reliable. But if you need to cut back on your participation while life is in transition, that's OK. We understand. Just talk with your Group Nutritionist to work out a plan. Don't assume if you can't do everything you're asked for awhile that you're not a valued participant. We need you in WHI, and we'll make it work!