MEN AND THE MIDLIFE CHALLENGE

He may not be able to put a finger on it, but a man moving through his 40s and 50s knows that something is happening to him. Part physical, part psychological, the change men undergo at midlife can be profoundly disruptive, in their own lives and in the lives of those around them. Or it can be a smooth cruise into a riper and richer phase of growth.

In short, what our culture has dubbed the "male midlife crisis" could take any number of shapes—and it may not be felt as a "crisis" at all. Experts can't agree on what to call it. The term "male menopause" has been coined by writers such as Gail Sheehy and Jed Diamond. Others use the term "andropause." But medical science hasn't found a clear-cut physical cause like that of the hormonal changes that occur with menopause in women.

Some doctors argue that certain common midlife symptoms—such as irritability, depression and sexual problems—could be linked to low testosterone and can be treated with hormone-replacement therapy (HRT). A major study of testosterone HRT was launched in Manchester, England, in 2002. But plenty of men apparently don't run short on this or other hormones. And testosterone can drop in early adulthood as well as middle age. Men really are different from women, who universally go through a hormonal change at about the same point in their lives.

Re-scripting life's dreams

But getting old is a universal fact for men (as it is, of course, for women), and men's awareness of it may lie behind much of their midlife emotions and behavior. They may finally have to come to terms with their mortality and the limits of what they'll be able to achieve.

I. Eugene White, a psychologist and college teacher in Salisbury, Md., says midlife is a time of "existential questioning" that serves as a reality check to the optimism of youth. "For the reflective and introspective man in our culture there is a recognition of time passing, of less time to live than he has lived, and, if necessary, a re-scripting of the dreams that he had as a 20-something man."

Women have to adjust their youthful dreams, too. The future to a 50-year-old is bound to look different from the seemingly unlimited prospects at 20, no matter what your gender.

Changing one's reference group

Ed Tuzman, a therapist based in the New York City area, and others say today's middle-aged men differ from women in another respect—they talk far less about their problems, and that can make their problems worse. "Men have a harder time than women because we're not comfortable, yet, expressing our feelings ... with other men." This heightens their sense of isolation, even as they maintain a stoic front. Tuzman says men in their 50s (he turned 60 in 2003) need to "find someone to talk to," even if this means finding a new circle of friends. "Sometimes a guy has to look outside his current reference group," says Tuzman. "They may not be the right people."

The cliché

What about the flashy flare-outs—the sports cars, divorces and affairs with young women? These are the culture's midlife-crisis cliches, but are they really all that common? "They're very much a reality for a certain group of people, for men who have money and can make these changes," says Tuzman. But he says others have "quieter crises ... they're
more likely to be anxious and depressed." White, also in his 50s, thinks the idea of a predictable midlife crisis is "overdone." Some middle-age men do look for younger women to make them feel more virile, he says, but it's still the exception to the rule: "The majority of men grow old gracefully with their partners."

**WHAT TO DO**

White and others who've studied the midlife challenge say it's especially crucial at this time to tend to relationships and to lead a balanced life, not so dominated by work. A marriage will continue to be vital, he says, "if people have made a conscious decision to keep it that way." Couples need to get past their role as parents, get back to focusing on each other and build a strong social network of friends. They also need to be committed to keeping the physical relationship strong, White says.

As for life outside of work, this is the time of life to branch out or, perhaps, return to old interests with new passion. White, who says he looks toward his retirement years with increasing optimism as he gets older, says happiness in older age seems tied closely to new knowledge and new experiences. "The real key to happy aging is lifelong learning," he says, which suggests that midlife is not too early to start the learning process, if it hasn't begun already.

**RESOURCES**


Sources: I. Eugene White, assistant professor, department of psychology, Salisbury State University, Salisbury, Md.; Len Tuzman, DSW, director, social work services, Zucker Hillside Hospital, Glen Oaks, N.Y.

By Tom Gray

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**CRISIS PLANNING: PREPARE FOR A RAINY DAY**

We all have rainy days, and some of us have hurricanes! You can prepare now for an emergency, large or small, by creating a kit. Write down all the needed information and store it in a safe place, so you'll have it when you need it.

An emergency kit is a type of umbrella. Sometimes you don't need to do much to prevent a small problem from turning into a big one. For example, if you lose your power in a storm but have a flashlight, you'll be able to find your keys, your meds and other important things. Without that light, your power emergency could quickly get out of hand.

**CRISIS PLAN: EXPECT THE UNEXPECTED**

Here are a few things to find now—before you need them—so you can prepare your own crisis plan:

1. **Medical information.** Make a list of your doctors and service providers. Write down the drugstores you use, your meds and renewal numbers. Also make note of any allergies, disabilities or diet restrictions. Write a few words about your most serious health problems.

2. **Important phone numbers.** Keep numbers handy for your medical and mental health doctor. Also write down the local police, fire department and utility companies (in case of a natural disaster).

3. **Contacts.** Write down names, addresses and phone numbers of close relatives, neighbors or other people who might be able to help you if you are having a hard time. Ask 1 or 2 if they would take you to a doctor or hospital, if you needed urgent care.

4. **A health care agent.** Ask someone you trust to take over your health care and make decisions for you, if you can't make them yourself. You can ask a family member, a neighbor or anyone you trust to make good decisions. Ask a
5. **Crisis information.** Think about this: what do you consider a crisis? What would you want people to know about you, if you are "in crisis"?

6. **Your preferred care.** Decide what care you want or don't want, in case you are seriously injured or ill and can't speak for yourself. You'll put this information in special forms called advanced directives. Check with your state or county health department.

7. **Loved ones.** If you have children or pets at home, find someone to care for them if you are suddenly sick or injured. Include their contact information in your kit. Be sure to write out instructions that person can follow to care for your loved ones.

**Natural disaster kit: Before the storm**

Here are some items you'll want to keep on hand, in case of a big storm or other natural disaster:

1. **Keep a few gallons of water, toilet paper and a flashlight (with batteries) handy.** You can store tap water in clean gallon jugs.
2. **Leave a small blanket and some basic first aid supplies** (bandages, cleansers and aspirin) in your car or home. You should do this no matter what the season.
3. **Buy a battery-operated radio in case the power goes out.**
4. **Put a can opener in a water-resistant container with a few canned meals,** fruit juices and other canned food.
5. **Include a small amount of cash in your kit, just in case.**

**Financial emergency kit: Money matters**

Here are some things you can put in a financial emergency kit:

1. **Start saving for an emergency now!** A little bit each week can add up fast, and will be here for you when you need it.
2. **Keep a record of account numbers.** Make a list of any credit cards, debit cards, bank accounts and pension or disability accounts. Put that list in a safe place.
3. **Keep all important receipts in a folder, shoebox or large envelope.** Be sure to label it so you can find what you need.
4. **Keep a copy of your health insurance coverage information in your kit.** Include your account number.
5. **Make copies of documents you wouldn't want to lose.** This includes your Medicare or Medicaid card, driver's license and Social Security card. Also your marriage or divorce information, birth certificates, child support papers or other legal papers. Keep these copies in your financial emergency kit.
6. **Keep the name and contact number of someone who might be able to help you if you have a money emergency.**

With some luck, you'll never need any of these kits, but if you do, you'll be glad you have them.

**Resource**

Mental Health America
2000 N. Beauregard St, 6th floor
Alexandria VA 22311
800-969-6642

Source: Maine Department of Health and Human Services, National Safety Council, Chicago Ill.

By Paula Hartman Cohen
PREPARING YOUR ADVANCE DIRECTIVES

Dying may be the most difficult aspect of life to face. And unfortunately, anyone can experience a serious illness or accident. That's why everyone older than 18 should prepare an advance directive—oral and written instructions about your future medical care in the case that you can't speak for yourself.

There are two types of advance directives: a living will and medical power of attorney. Often they may be combined in a single document. According to the American Association of Retired Persons (AARP), about 75 percent of Americans favor advance directives, but only 30 percent to 35 percent prepare them. It's important to prepare an advance directive before a terminal illness or emergency situation occurs. Without direction from you or family members, medical staffers must keep you alive as long as possible.

To make sure others understand and carry out your treatment wishes, you should prepare both a living will and medical power of attorney. Medical power of attorney offers some flexibility in the face of changing medical circumstances, while a living will can serve as a guide for decision making.

FACTS ABOUT A LIVING WILL

A living will is a written document that explains your wishes regarding medical treatment if you become unable to communicate. State laws may govern how and when a living will goes into effect and can limit treatments covered. But constitutional law protects your right to refuse or accept any treatment.

FACTS ABOUT MEDICAL POWER OF ATTORNEY

Also called a "health care proxy" or "appointment of a health care agent," medical power of attorney is a written document that gives a person designated by you the authority to make medical treatment decisions for you if you can't make them yourself. The agent should know you well and understand your wishes for treatment. That person also takes on the responsibility of making decisions in unforeseen situations.

PLANNING ADVANCE DIRECTIVES

First and foremost, you should seriously discuss your options and treatment wishes with friends and family. They should understand your wishes before a crisis. Consider:

- how you want to be treated when you are dying
- any treatments you know you want to accept or refuse
- fears you may have about treatments or situations that could occur
- religious or moral beliefs that could influence your feelings or decisions
- your feelings about doctors and caregivers

You also should talk to your doctor so that you understand your options and the procedures involved. Ask about specific treatments—such as artificial hydration and nutrition, CPR and mechanical ventilation—and make sure you know how, why and when they would be used. Be sure to discuss pain management options as well. Keep your doctor informed of your decisions and make sure she's willing to carry out your wishes.

When planning for medical power of attorney, consider whom you will designate as your health care agent. This person will serve as your voice and advocate. Your health care agent should be someone you trust who understands your treatment wishes. Make sure you have meaningful discussions about your options and decisions—that can help ease the agent's mind in a crisis.
PREPARING ADVANCE DIRECTIVES

Under federal law, health care facilities that receive Medicaid and Medicare funds must inform patients of their right to execute advance directives. But it's up to you to make sure your advance directives comply with your state's laws. If you spend significant time in more than one state, draw up a set of documents for each of them. Some health care facilities distribute state-specific documents, or you can find them on the Web. And organizations such as AARP provide resources that help explain applicable laws state-by-state as well as other legal assistance.

Once you have executed your advance directives, you should make several copies of the documents. Give copies to your doctor, health care agent and family members. Keep the original in a secure place, but not in a safe deposit box. Finally, be sure to reassess your decisions over time, and take the appropriate steps to make sure any changes are understood and documented.

By Kristen Knight
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DISASTER SUPPLIES KIT

Disasters happen anytime and anywhere. And when disaster strikes, you may not have much time to respond. A highway spill or hazardous material could mean evacuation. A winter storm could confine your family at home. An earthquake, flood, tornado or any other disaster could cut water, electricity and telephones—for days.

After a disaster, local officials and relief workers will be on the scene, but they cannot reach everyone immediately. You could get help in hours or it may take days. Would your family be prepared to cope with the emergency until help arrives?

Your family will cope best by preparing for disaster before it strikes. One way to prepare is by assembling a disaster supplies kit. Once disaster hits, you won't have time to shop or search for supplies. But if you've gathered supplies in advance, your family can endure an evacuation or home confinement.

PREPARE YOUR KIT

- Review the checklist below.
- Gather the supplies that are listed. You may need them if your family is confined at home.
- Place the supplies you'd most likely need for an evacuation in an easy-to-carry container. These supplies are listed with an asterisk (*).
- There are 6 basics you should stock for your home: water, food, first-aid supplies, clothing and bedding, tools and emergency supplies, and special items. Keep the items that you would most likely need during an evacuation in an easy-to-carry container—suggested items are marked with an asterisk(*).

POSSIBLE CONTAINERS INCLUDE

- a large, covered trash container
- a camping backpack
- a duffel bag

WATER

- Store water in plastic containers such as soft-drink bottles. Avoid using containers that will decompose or break, such as milk cartons or glass bottles. A normally active person needs to drink at least two quarts of water each day. Hot environments and intense physical activity can double that amount. Children, nursing mothers and ill people will need more.
• Store one gallon of water per person per day.
• Keep at least a three-day supply of water per person (two quarts for drinking, two quarts for each person in your household for food preparation/sanitation).

**Food**

• Store at least a three-day supply of nonperishable food. Select foods that require no refrigeration, preparation or cooking, and little or no water. If you must heat food, pack a can of sterno. Select food items that are compact and lightweight. Include a selection of the following foods in your Disaster Supplies Kit: ready-to-eat canned meats, fruits and vegetables.

**First-Aid Kit**

Assemble a first-aid kit for your home and one for each car. A first-aid kit should include:

• sterile adhesive bandages in assorted sizes
• assorted sizes of safety pins
• cleansing agent/soap
• latex gloves (two pairs) or nonlatex gloves
• sunscreen
• 2-inch sterile gauze pads (four to six)
• 4-inch sterile gauze pads (four to six)
• triangular bandages (three)
• nonprescription drugs
• 2-inch sterile roller bandages (three rolls)
• 3-inch sterile roller bandages (three rolls)
• scissors
• tweezers
• needle
• moistened towelettes
• antiseptic
• thermometer
• tongue blades (two)
• tube of petroleum jelly or other lubricant

**Nonprescription Drugs**

• aspirin or nonaspirin pain reliever
• antidiarrhea medication
• antacid (for stomach upset)
• syrup of ipecac (use to induce vomiting if advised by the Poison Control Center)
• laxative
• activated charcoal (use if advised by the Poison Control Center)

**Tools and Supplies**

• mess kits or paper cups, plates and plastic utensils
• emergency preparedness manual
• battery-operated radio and extra batteries
• flashlight and extra batteries
• cash or traveler's checks, change
• nonelectric can opener, utility knife
• fire extinguisher: small canister ABC type
• tube tent
• pliers
• tape
• compass
• matches in a waterproof container
• aluminum foil
• plastic storage containers
• signal flare
• paper, pencil
• needles, thread
• medicine dropper
• shut-off wrench, to turn off household gas and water
• whistle
• plastic sheeting
• map of the area (for locating shelters)

Sanitation

• toilet paper, towelettes
• soap, liquid detergent
• feminine supplies
• personal hygiene items
• plastic garbage bags, ties (for personal sanitation uses)
• plastic bucket with tight lid
• disinfectant
• household chlorine bleach

Clothing and bedding

• Include at least one complete change of clothing and footwear per person.
• sturdy shoes or work boots
• rain gear
• blankets or sleeping bags
• hat and gloves
• thermal underwear
• sunglasses

Special items

• Remember family members with special requirements, such as infants and elderly or disabled persons

For baby

• formula
• diapers
• bottles
• powdered milk
• medications

For adults
heart and high blood pressure medication
insulin
prescription drugs
denture needs
contact lenses and supplies
extra eye glasses

**Entertainment**
- games and books

**Important Family Documents**
- Keep these records in a waterproof, portable container:
  - will, insurance policies, contracts deeds, stocks and bonds
  - passports, social-security cards, immunization records
  - bank account numbers
  - credit-card account numbers and companies
- inventory of valuable household goods, important telephone numbers
- family records (birth, marriage, death certificates)
- Store your kit in a convenient place known to all family members. Keep a smaller version of the Disaster Supplies Kit in the trunk of your car.
- Keep items in airtight plastic bags. Change your stored water supply every six months so it stays fresh. Replace your stored food every six months. Re-think your kit and family needs at least once a year. Replace batteries, update clothes, etc.
- Ask your physician or pharmacist about storing prescription medications.


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**MANAGING A CHRONIC ILLNESS DURING A DISASTER**

Surviving a natural or man-made disaster is no small thing, especially for those who have a chronic illness. During a disaster access to health care, personal support and medication are lessened. This leaves people with chronic medical conditions at risk for serious medical complications—even to the point of death.

**What is a chronic illness?**

A chronic illness is a medical problem that lasts a year or longer, limits what a person can do, and calls for ongoing care. More than 90 million Americans live with some form of chronic illness. Examples of common chronic illnesses include:
- diabetes
- chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD)
- heart disease
- chronic pain syndromes
- inflammatory diseases, such as rheumatoid arthritis

**Prepare for an emergency**

Because we seldom know when disaster will strike, it is important for those with chronic conditions and their caregivers to make specific plans and arrangements. Here are some tips to help you plan for and manage a chronic medical condition during a disaster.
1. Let your family, friends, and others in your support network know of your condition and how to help you in an emergency. Be specific. Get commitments from others to help in an actual emergency.

2. Pack an emergency kit. Have a bag that is readily available that contains:
   - an identification and medical information card with your name, address, phone number, insurance information, physicians' contact information and emergency contact person
   - a list of your specific illnesses and medications. The list should also include information about dosages and any allergies you may have.
   - an adequate supply of your medications—at least a week's supply if possible
   - any special equipment you require, for example, portable oxygen canisters
   - your personal hygiene products
   - special foods or supplements as required by your condition

3. Talk to your doctors about emergency medical plans. Ask specific questions about your medical care and what you should do if disaster strikes and your doctor cannot care for you.

4. If you need regular treatments, determine who could provide this for you if the clinic or health professional is not available. In some cases a family member can learn how to give medications and treatments during an emergency. For example, some patients with lung disease require breathing treatments that are usually performed by a respiratory therapist but can be easily learned by a nonprofessional. In the case of more complicated treatment, contact the local or neighboring hospital emergency department to arrange treatment during an emergency.

5. If you are not able to walk, be sure to notify the local authorities and disaster response agencies, such as the Red Cross. Give them specific information about your condition so that disaster workers know how to contact you, and let you know about their disaster, rescue and evacuation procedures. Let them know of any special needs you have.

6. Plan where you will go and which health care providers will care for you if you have to leave your community. Your doctor can advise you of clinics and specialists in other communities.

7. In the event of a disaster, don’t panic. Simply carry out your plans and keep your wits about you. Use your energy to stay focused on the solution, not the problem.

Planning is the single best thing you can do to prepare for an emergency. Seeking the wisdom and support of your family and friends in preparing for disaster and making emergency plans is time well spent.

Sources:

National Center for Chronic Disease Prevention and Health Promotion.

The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation.

By Drew Edwards, EdD

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