Coping with inevitable changes is key to mental health

By Carol Zimmermann
Catholic News Service

WASHINGTON — Change is said to be the only constant in today's world. Yet when it comes, it often throws people off guard and causes stress and anxiety.

The key to successfully dealing with change is preparing for it (when possible) and making necessary adjustments when it happens, according to health experts.

“All major changes involve a component of loss at their center,” said Cara DiMarco, author of “Moving Through Life Transitions With Power and Purpose.” She said that loss could be anything from the loss of a particular routine to the sense of lost opportunities and lost hope.

DiMarco’s suggestions for dealing with change are posted on the website of Dignity Health, formerly Catholic Healthcare West, which is based in San Francisco and sponsored by a number of women’s religious congregations.

The author suggests that people give themselves time to adapt to change, such as starting a new job, and should not expect to adjust to a new routine immediately without missing a boat.

When possible, she also suggests planning for change as a way to have more options. For example, parents of children in high school know their children will eventually leave home and in preparation for that they should think about what they will do with their newfound time.

DiMarco also suggests that people try to learn from change, noting that one can “learn from every experience” even if the person didn’t choose for a particular experience to happen. “If you can find the meaning or valuable outcome behind it, that experience will become part of your internal world, rather than an external agent acting on you,” she said.

Beliefnet.com, an online community that provides information about various religious and spiritual beliefs, has a section devoted to what the Bible has to say about change. The introduction notes that many people cope with unexpected change on a grand scale in the world around them and on a smaller scale because of their own personal circumstances.

“The Bible offers us very clear reminders that we can always rely on God. No matter how dire our circumstances, no matter how uncertain everything may be, God is eternal,” it says.

Several highlighted passages are from the Book of Psalms where the psalmist frequently likens God to an anchor with descriptions such as rock, fortress, deliverer, shield or stronghold.

Although relying on one’s faith is a major way to navigate through change there are also practical nonspiritual tools people can use.

Helpguide.org, an online resource in collaboration with Harvard Medical School Health Publications, urges people to cope with stress — often caused by change — in healthy ways. Unhealthy responses include smoking, overeating, sleeping too much, withdrawing from friends or spending too much time watching television or on the computer.

The guide recommends that people make time for fun and relaxation, eat right, and exercise. People make time for fun and relaxation, eat right, and exercise.

In the long run, it’s easier than railing against a situation you can’t change.”

Meatless Fridays can have practical, penitential benefits

By Sara Angle
Catholic News Service

WASHINGTON — Catholics who abstain from meat on Fridays are not only taking part in a spiritual exercise but they also are taking steps to improve their health and the environment, according to nutritional and sustainability experts.

Catholics worldwide are familiar with abstaining from meat on Fridays during Lent, but since the fall of 2011, Catholics in Wales and England have been asked by their bishops to make this practice a yearlong effort, reviving the countries’ previous Friday penance regulations, which were relaxed in 1984.

A statement announcing the new regulation said: “The bishops wish to re-establish the practice of Friday penance in the lives of the faithful as a clear and distinctive mark of their own Catholic identity.”

Although the new regulation only applies to England and Wales, it reinstates the long-forgotten Catholic tradition of Friday penances. Friday, the day of Jesus’ death, was observed as a day of penance in the Catholic Church until reforms put in place after the Second Vatican Council.

At that time, instead of asking Catholics to abstain from meat on Fridays, bishops worldwide allowed them to choose their own penance. Without a set penance, the yearlong meatless Friday practice was quickly forgotten.

Catholics in England and Wales who already don’t eat meat are advised to give up another food. Reducing intake of refined grains, added sugars or saturated fatty acids and trans fatty acids for one day can be beneficial, according to the 2010 Dietary Guidelines for Americans.

Those who decide to go meatless — even for a day — should keep...
Good night’s sleep benefits overall health

By Carol Zimmermann
Catholic News Service

WASHINGTON – People who want better health and improved memory and mood need look no further than their own bed since health experts have long stressed that a good night’s sleep can help one’s physical and mental health.

But doctors haven’t been the only ones advising rest. The Bible is full of endorsements of this practice and right from the start, too, by noting that one day a week should be set apart for the sole purpose of it.

And long before any studies were published about the benefits of sleep, the psalmist wrote of the foolishness of getting up too early and going to bed too late.

Jesus told his followers that he would give them rest, and he also attempted, although usually unsuccessfully, to get away from the crowds, most likely for some rest. But he also didn’t overemphasize sleep. In fact, in the Garden of Gethsemane, after leaving his disciples to pray, he came back and questioned why they were still sleeping.

Although Jesus was not likely making a health point, it is true that too much sleep is also not a good thing.

Health experts warn that habitual oversleeping could be the result of an underlying health problem or could cause other health issues.

They usually recommend that adults get at least six hours of sleep. A study by the Scripps Clinic Sleep Center in La Jolla, Calif., says the ideal amount of sleep each night is between 6.5 and 7.5 hours.

Sleep loss does a lot more than just make people tired. According to a study by Harvard University’s medical school, lack of enough shut-eye can hamper one’s memory, cause weight gain and irritability, alters one’s immune functions and potentially harm one’s heart.

For those who suffer from insomnia – trouble falling asleep or staying asleep – or chronic sleep disorders such as sleep apnea, restless legs syndrome or narcolepsy – extreme sleepiness during the day – getting a good night’s rest often seems out of reach.

Getting a good night’s rest doesn’t necessarily require the most expensive bed or extensive medical treatment. The Mayo Clinic, based in Rochester, Minn., offers the following basic steps to better sleep:

– Stick to a sleep schedule. Go to bed and get up at the same time every day, even on weekends, holidays and days off. This routine reinforces the body’s sleep-wake cycle and helps promote better sleep at night. Those unable to fall asleep within 15 minutes should get up and do something relaxing and then go back to bed later, since agonizing about falling asleep might make it harder to do so.

– Pay attention to food and drink. Don’t go to bed either too hungry or too full as this discomfort can keep one awake. Limit drinks before bed to prevent nighttime trips to the bathroom and limit nicotine, caffeine and alcohol use as their stimulating effects, which take hours to wear off, can disrupt sleep.

– Create a bedtime ritual. Do the same things each night such as taking a warm bath or shower, reading a book or listening to soothing music to tell the body it’s time to wind down. Relaxing activities can promote better sleep by easing the transition from the day’s activities to rest. Watching television or checking e-mails is not a suggested ritual as research suggests that these pre-sleep activities can interfere with sleep.

– Get comfortable. Create a cool, dark and quiet room that is ideal for sleeping and be sure to have a comfortable bed and pillows.

– Limit daytime naps. Long daytime naps can interfere with nighttime sleep.

– Make room for physical activity in the day. Regular physical activity has been shown to help people fall asleep faster and have a deeper sleep, but evening exercise could backfire – making one too energized to fall asleep.

– Manage stress. Sleep often suffers for those with too much to do and too much to think about. If sleep troubles persist, see a doctor. Identifying and treating any underlying causes can help put this problem to rest, so to speak.

MEATLESS: Giving up meat on Mondays and Fridays beneficial

FROM PAGE 2B

in mind that a meat-free diet does not automatically equal “healthy.”

The American Heart Association explains that a vegetarian diet can be unhealthy if it contains too many calories or saturated fat and not enough nutrients. The group advises selecting meat substitutes such as dried beans, peas, lentils or tofu for etrees or soups.

When those who frequently eat meat give up this food even once a week, the health and environmental impact is significant. A 2010 study from England’s University of Oxford and funded by Friends of the Earth, an international grassroots organization, found that more than 45,000 lives each year could be saved in the United Kingdom alone if people cut their meat intake to three servings a week, decreasing incidents of heart disease, cancer and stroke.

Meatless Fridays predates the popular grass-roots movement Meatless Mondays, a secular nonprofit movement that seeks to reduce meat consumption for personal health and environmental benefits. Meatless Mondays was launched by the Johns Hopkins and Columbia University schools of public health in 2003.
Health care centers want their workers to set good example on wellness

By Carol Zimmermann
Catholic News Service

WASHINGTON – Health care centers, doctors’ offices and hospitals provide plenty of advice on the importance of healthy living by extolling the importance of good diet and exercise and warning about the dangers of smoking. But do workers at these places follow their own advice?

Not always, said Dr. Carlos Reynes, medical director of Inspire Health, the employee wellness program at Gottlieb Memorial Hospital in Chicago, which is part of the Loyola University Health System.

“Health facilities should be leaders in wellness programs but often they aren’t,” he said, adding that it is “really important to set an example for the community ...

So to get its employees in better health, Gottlieb changed some of the ways it operates. It no longer took for granted that employees were eating the right things, exercising when possible and getting physical checkups, and instead began providing the means and incentives for good employee health.

Some of the changes incorporated in 2009 were basic ones such as establishing no smoking policies and offering meat-free Mondays in the hospital’s cafeteria and healthier options in the snack machines. It also offered an on-campus fitness center open to the community and with major discounts for employee memberships.

Special health-incentive events for employees are also provided each month such as wellness lectures, free screenings and exercise-incentive programs.

“Hospital employees are so busy getting everyone else well that they often neglect their own wellness, and we want Gottlieb staff to know that we are here for them,” said Reynes.

The hospital also offers employee discounts in insurance premiums for employees who take an online health risk assessment and participate in onsite screenings.

Gloria Murray, director of the Gottlieb Center for Fitness and also director of the employee wellness program at the hospital, noted that changes are not going to come overnight for employees but are part of a gradual adjustment.

She said the hospital is encouraging its employees to be active, and those who do so six days a week can enter raffles for prizes.

Everyone is at a different level, she said, noting that employees range from marathoners to those who can barely walk to their car in the parking lot, and they are all encouraged to work at their own pace to increase their level of activity. The hospital also sponsors a weight-loss program with employee teams of four rewarded with prizes for the most weight lost.

“It’s a simple model,” she said. “Like anything, teamwork keeps that person who was thinking of dropping out engaged.”

Murray noted that keeping employees healthy also has benefits for employers in terms of “skyrocketing costs of health care expenditures.” Simply put: Healthy employees cost less.

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Helping children stay fit needs to be a group effort

By Sara Angle
Catholic News Service

WASHINGTON – Today's youth can't be expected to solve the problem of childhood obesity all by themselves. When shocking studies came out in the early 2000s about childhood obesity rates, people began looking for someone to blame. Fingers were pointed at parents, schools, food companies and even the government. The reality of the epidemic is that childhood health needs to be part of a group effort to fight the entire nation's scale-tipping tendency.

As many parents know, early childhood nutrition begins at home, so parents play a key role in helping their children develop healthy habits by setting a good example, monitoring and portioning their child's food, and encouraging physical activity.

The website Kidshealth.org explains that "food preferences are developed early in life," and "likes and dislikes begin forming even when kids are babies." It also says that getting a child to accept a new food may take several tries, but getting him or her to enjoy nutritious foods early forms lifelong habits.

Parents should set an example both in healthy eating and in exercise. They should encourage children to join a sports team or participate in another group fitness activity, because these not only provide exercise but help children learn about teamwork, dedication and time management.

Parents aren't the only ones responsible for ensuring their child lives a balanced lifestyle, though, and the government also is doing its part to end childhood obesity.

The Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act of 2010 created an initiative organized by the U.S. government to promote and provide healthy food in schools. The act is renewable by Congress every five years, with changes made as needed. The latest changes specifically focused on childhood obesity and giving all children access to nutritious foods.

The act also allows the USDA to make significant changes to school lunch and breakfast programs to increase the nutrition value of the meals. This is the first time in 30 years that the USDA has been given the power to make such changes, and in the past 30 years obesity prevalence among children and adolescents had almost tripled, according to Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

After the act was signed, it received support from then Catholic Charities USA president and CEO Father Larry Snyder.

"This critical legislation ensures that more of our nation's children have access to healthy nutritious food and reaffirms our commitment as a nation to addressing the problem of childhood hunger," he said.

First lady Michelle Obama is taking matters into her own hands with the "Let's Move" campaign, a comprehensive initiative that began in 2010 to solve childhood obesity. The campaign claims that "everyone has a role to play in reducing childhood obesity ... including faith-based organizations."

Catholic schools nationwide have been making strides toward helping children learn healthy lifelong practices in fitness and nutrition. In the recent years, more Catholic schools have developed wellness policies that set guidelines for students, teachers and administrators. The policies also prioritize health and wellness initiatives in the curriculum.

Nutritional education, biannual screenings, daily opportunities for physical activities and making fruit available at all meals are some of the measures outlined in the wellness policy at St. Bartholomew School in Miramar, Fl.

WELLNESS: Providing programs benefit all

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employees will take less time off work and experience fewer medical costs.

She also pointed out that the employee-employee partnership is a unique way to incorporate changes in people's daily lives.

She said the hospital had to ease in some of its new health policies. For instance, she said it shouldn't immediately impose a smoke-free campus but first provided educational seminars on the dangers of smoking and then provided programs to help people stop smoking.

"A number of companies have a much harder line," she said. "We understand the stress of a job ... and also that people can't just flip a switch" to change their behavior.

Scripps Health, which is based in San Diego and includes Scripps Mercy Hospital, a Catholic hospital, similarly has been incorporating employee health and wellness programs.

Vic Buzachero, senior vice president for Innovation, Human Resources and Performance Management at Scripps Health, said the program, running since 2006, is important for a basic reason: Patients need care from people who are in good health.

Scripps, like Loyola University Health System, provides employees with access to fitness centers, wellness workshops and healthy cafeteria options.

She also noted that so many health risks are preventable such as high cholesterol levels, high blood pressure, being overweight or inactive and borderline diabetes.

Boonville, Mo., has vowed to limit celebrations that involve food and encourages teachers and staff not to use food or beverages as rewards for academic performance or good behavior.

Shrine Catholic Grade School in Royal Oak, Mich., participated and won first place in a 2011 county-wide fitness program called "Count Your Steps." The program encouraged students to get out and move, and the school with the most steps in the month of March took a visit to the Detroit Zoo.

One program from Catholic Charities in St. Louis teaches high school students to grow their own produce. In 2011 Catholic Charities received a $1,000 grant from UnitedHealth Group for developing its program to combat childhood obesity, City Greens.

"Youth attending our program learn about basic agriculture and eat the vegetables," Judith Arnold, grant manager at Catholic Charities St. Louis told Catholic News Service. She also noted that the community served by the program has a high rate of diabetes, hypertension and heart disease.

The youth gardening project uses hydroponics – a process of growing plants in water – to grow affordable and healthy food, which is then sold at a local market and a mobile market, providing fresh produce in an otherwise "food desert" or an area where healthy, affordable food is difficult to obtain.

And while these young gardeners gained planting and harvesting skills through the project, they most likely also learned another skill without even realizing it: stewardship of God's creation.
WASHINGTON – Today, with so many families operating at warp-speed busyness because of work and after school activities, the idea of sitting down together for a family meal may seem like a quaint notion from a bygone era.

Instead, families eat at odd times and frequently not together. Parents and children grab dinner on the go or eat when it’s convenient, often in the company of the television, computer or cell phone.

While many may just chalk this up as a casualty of modern life, plenty of experts advise against it. They urge families to find a way to spend time together at the dinner table, even if it’s just for takeout food. The key, they say, is consistency, not gathering at the table just for big holiday bashes but on a regular basis for good old-fashioned and in-person conversation.

According to one group, the benefits of such a basic activity are far reaching. More than 12 years of studies by the National Center on Addiction and Substance Abuse, known as CASA, at Columbia University in New York has consistently found that the more often children eat dinner with their families, the less likely they are to smoke, drink or use drugs.

The group’s latest study on family dinners found that teens in particular who have infrequent family dinners (fewer than three per week) are almost four times likelier to use tobacco; more than three-and-one-half times as likely to use alcohol and think it is OK for their age group to get drunk; three times likelier to use marijuana; and almost twice likelier to admit they expect to try drugs in the future than teens who have frequent family dinners (five to seven meals per week).

The study also found that children who ate regular family meals were 40 percent likelier to get good grades in school. Out of teenagers who dined with their parents and siblings fewer than three times per week, 20 percent received below-average or failing grades, compared with 9 percent of their age group who ate family dinners regularly.

The original finding in 2001 prompted the organization to institute a national movement to remind families that frequent dinners make a difference. The highlight of the initiative is an annual day – the fourth Monday in September – specifically devoted to families eating dinner together.

Organizers of the national program realize the family dinner concept is a foreign concept to many and have provided the necessary tools to help families get started with recipes and even conversation starters posted on the website casa familyday.org.

Archbishop Henry J. Mansell of Hartford, Conn., also endorsed the promotion of family mealtime in a 2011 column in The Catholic Transcript, Hartford’s diocesan newspaper.

He said the “Catechism of the Catholic Church” spells out how the family is “the original cell of social life” but he also realized the “tremendous obstacles that families face in meeting the challenges of every day.”

“The important thing is for the family to be together and to recognize the value of doing this frequently during every week,” he said. He also noted that families should...
Hardest part of exercise is often just doing it

By Carol Zimmermann
Catholic News Service

WASHINGTON — Although the benefits of exercise are endless, many people simply do not find or make the time to keep fit.

Health reports and doctors' advice can't seem to stress enough how regular exercise can reduce the risk of heart disease, diabetes, high blood pressure, obesity, back pain and osteoporosis along with improving mood and regulating stress.

But obtaining these benefits obviously requires some activity. For the greatest overall health benefits, experts recommend 20-30 minutes of aerobic activity three or more times a week and some type of muscle strengthening activity and stretching at least twice a week.

At the very least, experts advise 30 minutes or more of moderate-intensity physical activity a day five times a week.

That may sound doable to some, but certainly not to others which explains why only 35 percent of U.S. adults exercise regularly according to a 2009 study by the Centers for Disease Control.

Employees at the Mayo Clinic, based in Rochester, Minn., have likely heard all the excuses for not exercising since their website lists popular barriers to exercising along with ways to overcome them. Some of the main obstacles listed included: no time, too tired, too lazy and lack of success in previous exercise attempts.

To the No. 1 excuse — no time — the website suggests taking creative ways to squeeze exercise into a hectic day such as taking short walks throughout the day, getting up a half hour earlier to exercise and parking in a far-away spot from one's destination.

Those with the too-lazy excuse are advised to start slowly and set realistic expectations such as a walk around the block which gradually becomes longer. They are also urged to block off times for physical activity and get support from friends and family.

For the group who feels they've tried to exercise in the past and failed, the main advice is “don't throw in the towel.” As with the other categories of excuses, this group is urged to pace themselves and stick with realistic goals such as exercising 20 minutes a day, three days a week for the first month.

Exercise doesn't mean expensive gym memberships either, according to the Mayo Clinic, since strengthening exercises can be done anywhere with exercise DVDs, lifting weights, walking in groups, taking the stairs instead of using the elevator and taking advantage of community center exercise programs.

There are also plenty of options for those who want to combine physical and spiritual exercise. Many church parishes offer some sort of exercise program which provides the opportunity to get together with other parishioners. There are also a variety of programs such as the rosary workout, rosaryworkout.com, which combines prayer with an exercise routine or activprayer.org which combines physical fitness with spiritual formation.

Luke Burgis, the founder of ActivPrayer who is currently a seminarian in the Las Vegas Diocese, said the program looks at exercise as part a whole process.

“As Christians, we believe that anything we do with love can be an offering to God. ActivPrayer members view workouts not as something to ‘get through’ but as a sanctifying experience that can help us grow both physically and spiritually.”

How effective any physical or spiritual exercise program is depends on the participants' first step, which in some cases may literally be a leap of faith.

DINNER: Families share more than food

FROM PAGE 6B

try to work around schedule conflicts and perhaps even schedule a meal other than dinner as the family get-together time.

He also put in a plug for turning off technological distractions during the meal.

“The important fact is that you are all there,” he said. “The long-term dividends your family will receive will be the profound spiritual and emotional return on your personal investment.”
Dash of faith is key ingredient in some cookbooks

By Sara Angle
Catholic News Service

WASHINGTON – Some cooks claim that the “secret ingredient” in their recipes is love, but faith is another intangible ingredient for many Catholic cooks.

During the Last Supper, Jesus encouraged the apostles to gather around a communal table – a celebration that has become the cornerstone of the Mass. Traditionally, gathering for meals has been an important way to bring together family, friends and loved ones, but for many, the preparation of the food is just as meaningful as the gathering itself.

For avid cooks and kitchen novices alike, cooking can be a fun and faith-inspiring activity that brings together families and communities and gives creative individuals an outlet for sharing their faith.

From celebrating feast days of saints to the seasons of Advent, Christmas, Lent and Easter, there is a dish waiting to be prepared with significance and shared with loved ones.

Church cookbooks are usually many people’s introduction to the faith-and-food world. They lead churches not only to craft a cookbook, but to build community. The sharing of family recipes brings new meaning to the breaking of bread that church parish communities share with each other at Mass.

Creating a church cookbook can be a way to commemorate a milestone for the church, raise money for a charity or church project or bring together a group of food-loving parishioners.

St. Sebastian Church in Milwaukee published a 225-page cookbook to celebrate its 100th anniversary in 2011. “It’s more than a cookbook. It’s a scrapbook and a window into the kitchens and dining rooms of our community, tying us closer together,” cookbook editor Julie Kennedy said on St. Sebastian’s website saintssebastianonline.net.

Many of the recipes were submitted as family favorites, but some have special significance for the church, including the recipe for shrimp chowder, a favorite at the parish fish fries; breakfast dishes from the winter framers’ market; and a pupusa recipe from the parish’s sister congregation in El Salvador.

The book is the third one produced by the church parish. Previous St. Sebastian cookbooks were published in 1965 and 1996.

There also are a host of cookbooks produced by major publishers that have a Catholic twist. Brother Victor-Antoine d’Avila-Latourrette is a Benedictine monk from upstate New York, who has written several cookbooks and a book called “Catholic Cuisine” – catholiccuisine.blogspot.com – where posts include scapular brownies and rosary cupcakes.

These blog posts not only share recipes and tips for kid-friendly foods, but also usually have a wealth of information about the symbolism of the meal and how it was inspired by their Catholic faith. A post for St. Crispin’s feast day, which is Oct. 25, features an apple crisp, while the feast of Blessed Pope John Paul II, Oct. 22, includes pirogues and papal cream cake.

Creating a church cookbook can be a way to commemorate a milestone for the church, raise money for a charity or church project.

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Our Lady of the Lake Regional Medical Center