

sures periodically. People work more effectively, feel more relaxed and can deal with pressures better when they take periodic, regular breaks or "get aways."

Good nutrition will help combat the bad effects of stress. Ironically, for most people sound eating habits are the first part of life to suffer during stressful periods. Well balanced, regular meals are necessary for the body to maintain its defenses to resist disease and illness and to give extra energy when needed. It is a common reaction for people to increase coffee drinking and smoking when they feel stressed. However, caffeine and nicotine only exaggerate the bad effects of stress. One must monitor or eliminate smoking and drinking of beverages with caffeine for effective stress management.

Good mental health is an important buffer for distress and a basic part of stress management. Studies have repeatedly shown that attitudes play a very important role in the experience of stress. Persons who are more likely to view changes as a challenge or opportunity, rather than a threat, are less likely to suffer distress. Good mental health involves positive attitudes about yourself and life. Realistic self-acceptance is a lifelong process that requires constant attention. Try to learn to accept yourself for who you are with all your strengths and weaknesses. Trusted friends and loved ones are a necessary resource for good mental health. Everyone needs someone with whom they can share their feelings. Telling someone else what's bothering you can play a vital role in combating distress.

Stresses in Mid-Life and Later Years

Awareness of common or predictable changes at each stage of life can help people to cope with the normal happenings and adjustments in life. Studies have shown that sudden life changes, such as moving, marriage, divorce, death of a spouse, or even change in a work schedule can cause distress and ill health. Some changes are common to people and families at mid-life and in later years.

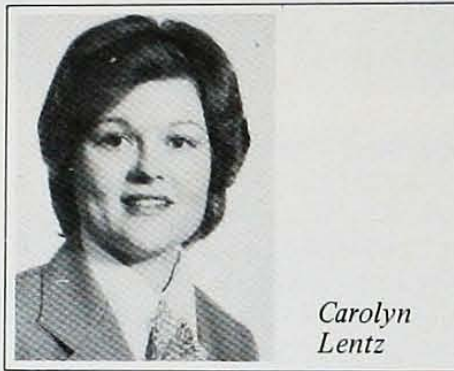
The average life expectancy is longer now than ever before in history. More women live longer than men. So women commonly face special changes and adjustments during mid-life and their later years.

Empty Nest Stage

One of the most striking features of modern family life in the later years is

the longer period of time that parents expect to live after their children leave home. The "empty nest" situation is a period of major adjustment for many mothers. Men commonly don't experience major changes in their roles or daily schedules until a few years later at retirement. When children leave home and a husband is still largely involved in his occupation, many women are challenged to readjust their daily routines and to find new interests and activities.

There are some common changes within a marriage when children leave home. Couples' conversations tend to focus less on children's activities and more on their own activities and interests. Companionship often gains a renewed emphasis for older couples.



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Retirement Stage

The husband's retirement is often identified as a particularly stressful period for many women. The daily household routine usually undergoes major changes to adapt to a newly retired husband. Household tasks are changed as husbands have more time to spend in the house and become more involved in household tasks. Studies have shown that many wives become increasingly disillusioned with the husband's retirement. One explanation is that retirement often fails to fulfill the woman's hope for more time to pursue her interests. Retirement commonly means learning to adjust to a fixed or reduced income. For many people retirement planning only involves financial planning. Early retirement planning for couples, including the development of interests and activities suitable to later years, is helpful in coping with the stresses of retirement. Adjusting to retirement involves having something to retire *to* rather than *from*.

Widowhood

Widowhood is a part of life for many women in their later years. Women generally live longer than men and often are younger than their husbands.

After age 65, only about half of women are living with their husbands. Widowhood touches most older families and demands new and dramatic changes in the lives of survivors. Clearly widowhood means loss, reorganization and learning. People wishing to help the newly widowed adjust might find help from the suggestions based on a study of widows and their adjustments. Helpful companions or friends of widows sympathetically listen to the widow's grief and relieve loneliness by sharing activities. Help with immediate crisis is helpful but help that encourages dependency is not. Major decisions, such as investments or a change in residence are best postponed for a year or so if possible, until a widow's outlook and life style adjust to the change. Children were found to be a valuable resource in a widow's adjustment.

Coping with Mid-Life and Later Years

Basically, mid-life and later years is a period of redirection. Many people commonly take time from the rat race of life and rethink their goals, values and meaning of life. Time and activities begin to take on a new meaning. Experience and wisdom become more important than sheer physical strength. Life and knowledge become richer with more experience. Freedom from responsibilities and demands of raising children offer new opportunities for personal growth and development of their own interests.

Some Suggestions

The following points may help you develop the "shock absorbers" to ease the bumps in the road of life that are common at mid-life and later years.

- Learn to adjust gracefully to decreasing strength and health. Nature's plan never intended that the later years of life would have the same energies as youth. Management of time and energies becomes an important source of coping with less energies.
- Plan early for retirement. Consider your lifestyle, interests and financial management. Many must learn to live on a reduced income. Consider developing hobbies and skills that will help fill time. Also consider some hobbies and skills that may be useful to supplement income. Have something to retire *to* rather than *from*.
- Be prepared to accept the death of loved ones. It is a normal part of life in the later years.