

[Retirement & Investments >](#)[Health & Well-Being >](#)[For Plan Sponsors >](#)[About Wespath >](#)

## Spotlight Topic—Chronic Stressors

When we feel stress—whether we realize it or not—our whole body reacts. The acute “fight or flight” response stimulates certain chemicals in our body to help us handle our stressors. Short-term stressors give the immune system a boost, but chronic stress can actually suppress the immune system. That in turn, can turn into chronic low-grade inflammation which by itself may have long-term negative impacts on health. These include risks for diabetes, ulcers, coronary artery disease, an indirect link to cancer, and mental and emotional conditions like depression and anxiety. Chronic stressors are often beyond people’s control and persist when a person cannot see a way out of a miserable situation.



The COVID-19 pandemic has now stretched more than seven months and it’s unclear when it may end. In response, many of us have changed how we work, see family and friends, worship, and more. COVID-19, racial, political, economic, denominational and other challenges at this time can all contribute to ongoing heightened stress. We must be proactive in finding ways to manage our stress and find time for selfcare. Below are some tools to actively address added stress and deter potential chronic issues. And, for a personal success story of overcoming stress for health, read [Rev. Arlene Christopherson’s article](#) (<https://www.wespath.org/health-well-being/dimensions-newsletter/October-2020/0003>) also in this issue:

1. Intentional Breathing—take slow deep breaths (total of 10 seconds for inhale + exhale together) and focus on a positive thought, a song or a peaceful place.
2. Social support—in-person gatherings may be canceled, but love, support, and a listening ear are not. Find ways to connect with your people.
3. Prioritize healthy habits—eat well, drink water, exercise, get 7-9 hours of sleep, get outside in sunshine and green space. Even one of these can help make a positive shift, and tackling a few can make a noticeable difference.
4. Reach out for help when you need it. Sometimes stress is heavy and we need more than prevention—we need someone to help us reset and find our path forward. Accessing emotional health counseling virtually is safe and can develop the same positive relationships and satisfaction as in-person therapy. No matter where you are in the process of dealing with your stress, a professional can help you sort through it.

These are just some options. The Northern Illinois Conference cabinet members are doing a well-being pilot with HeartMath led by Woody Bedell that focuses on achieving coherence through breathing and positive thinking. For more information, visit [heartmath.com](https://www.heartmath.com/) (<https://www.heartmath.com/>). There are also some great resources at [Wespath.org](https://www.wespath.org) (<https://www.wespath.org>). Whatever works best for you is a good strategy. The ongoing, chronic stress we face as a result of COVID can be life-altering. It’s only through proactively addressing and managing that stress head on that we can expose the positive ways this change may have shaped our lives.

**Sources:**

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CONNECTING ELEMENTS OF WELL-BEING

Dimensions  
Newsletter



[Retirement & Investments >](#)

[Health & Well-Being >](#)

[For Plan Sponsors >](#)

[About Wespath >](#)

## How Wespath Cares for Your Well-Being Remotely

Well-being is an integral focus for Wespath. Well-being isn't just a number like blood pressure or cholesterol. It is far more complex. Well-being involves how we connect with one another. It is also about our resiliency, our finances, and our purpose. For this reason, Wespath well-being programs are designed to offer resources in multiple dimensions.

Wespath uses a five-dimension model to address financial, physical, emotional, spiritual and social aspects covering most areas of life. Individuals interact with and embrace the five dimensions differently. Each dimension influences the others and a healthy balance can help keep a person well. For example, financial stress can impact the physical dimension, social dimension and emotional dimension. Physical complications can affect the social, financial and emotional dimensions, and so on. Through research, we know making improvements in one dimension can positively impact other dimensions. So, no matter where you wish to start, small steps in even one dimension can have a big effect on your overall well-being.

Helping participants live their best life possible is important to Wespath and the Church. Some ways we provide support in each dimension are:

### Financial

Wespath manages the pension and retirement benefits for all eligible clergy and laity. This dimension is supported by Benefits Access where you will find current account balances and tools to help you understand your retirement needs. Everyone who has a retirement account balance with Wespath also has access to EY Financial Planning Services. The hallmark of EY is unlimited telephonic access to financial planners that can help on everything from managing debt to estate planning. And stay tuned for the new Saving Grace curriculum coming in November 2020.

### Physical

The Physical dimension is supported through a wide array of toolkits and other resources. The toolkits provided in the areas of nutrition, physical activity, diabetes prevention and more are written by industry experts within the Wespath Benefit Plans Department with the goal of providing useful information in easy-to-understand language. Many annual conferences and employers offer the Virgin Pulse well-being program. Participants in Wespath's HealthFlex plan have the Virgin Pulse program as well as other wellness offerings like Omada for diabetes prevention and WW (formerly Weight Watchers). Ask your benefits administrator if these programs are available to you.

### Social

The Social dimension is all about connecting with others. It is not about the quantity of friends but the quality of friendships. Think of it this way, the friends you call when you need someone to listen or to help you move are high-quality friends and can be a great support system. Connecting with friends has never been easier digitally, but sometimes a phone call or a handwritten note can go a long way to express your gratitude for their friendship. Wespath.org offers a variety of resources to reinvigorate your social dimension including friendship guidelines and tips for a healthy marriage. And don't forget the social (and physical) benefits of a good walking challenge!

### Emotional

The Emotional dimension focuses on resiliency or how you bounce back from a stressful situation. Experiencing high stress situations is very common for clergy even in regular times. In current times, these stresses are even more complicated. It is important to understand how you respond to stress as this can help you bounce back quicker. Improving your resiliency takes practice just like improving your strength or cardiovascular endurance, but it's absolutely worth the effort. View our [Resiliency Toolkit](https://www.wespath.org/assets/1/7/5222.pdf) (<https://www.wespath.org/assets/1/7/5222.pdf>) for guidance.

### Spiritual

The Spiritual dimension includes activities like prayer, meditation and worship as well as relationships with others and God. Each year, Virgin Pulse offers activities that encourage personal spiritual enrichment. Other things you can do are set aside time for spiritual enrichment, focus on work/life balance and review the Wespath-published brochure [50 Ways to Support Your Pastor's Well-being](https://www.wespath.org/assets/1/7/4775.pdf) (<https://www.wespath.org/assets/1/7/4775.pdf>).

Our mission statement at Wespath is "Caring for those who serve". We live into this mission by developing materials and selecting programs/vendors that support the Five Dimensions of Health. Our hope is that you engage with these resources to find your best balance.



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Dimensions  
Newsletter



## Success Story: Finding Strength Through Stress Management

### Rev. Arlene W. Christopherson, Northern Illinois Conference

Christmas Eve 2013 took a turn I never could have predicted. That afternoon, my doctor phoned to give me the results of a biopsy on a tumor found in my breast during a routine mammogram a few weeks earlier. There is no breast cancer history in my family, but this was cancer - a lobular tumor. Within days I was swept up into the world of internet searches, oncologists, medical jargon, surgeons and scans. During the first 24 hours I was numb, which was good, because I didn't want my news to overshadow our family's Christmas Day gathering.

The early days of the treatment were intense, but after a time, the work of beating cancer became part of my routine. For five years following the more aggressive treatment, I stayed faithful to a drug therapy that altered my body chemistry in challenging ways but gave me some insurance against future recurrence. In the spring of 2019, I was glad to begin a new chapter as a survivor, having finished my course of treatment.

It took almost another year for the side effects of the ongoing treatment to lift. I was feeling normal again and ready to celebrate just as we entered into our new reality of the COVID-19 pandemic. On came another period of unpredictability, with eight months of social distancing, Zooming and learning to adapt in so many ways. Now we live wondering what the new normal will look like when we get there.

In those early days of learning to live with the stress of a cancer diagnosis, I found strength in routine which included my job as Assistant to the Bishop, a focus on exercise and weight loss and desire to find "a new normal" in relationships, physical appearance and activities.

I was already a faithful Virgin Pulse tracker, but the monitoring of my activity now took on deeper meaning. I linked the *My Fitness Pal* app to Virgin Pulse and learned more about healthy eating. I never went on a "diet" but I built better habits, balancing my protein, carbs and fats. Eventually, I lost 50 lbs. I found acupuncture a good alternative to taking drugs to counteract the side effects of taking drugs, and I learned to value the benefits of a good night's sleep.

As we move through a season of stress brought on by the pandemic, our struggles as a nation with our history of racism, daily reports of violence and a contentious political season, much of what I learned to do to address stress during cancer has helped me to maintain balance in these unprecedented times. I haven't arrived, there are still days when circumstances can feel overwhelming, but now I have some solid habits and practices I can fall back on and embrace. Virgin Pulse continues to be at the heart of my routine.



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Dimensions  
Newsletter



[Retirement & Investments >](#)

[Health & Well-Being >](#)

[For Plan Sponsors >](#)

[About Wespath >](#)

## Healthy Recipe: Poke-on-the-Go Bowl

Tuna Poke Bowls are a trending fast-food alternative, providing hungry folks with nutrient-rich, heart-healthy antidote to carb-laden burgers and fries. With this issue's "Healthy Recipe" we bring you Poke Bowl-To-Go—a recipe for Poke Bowls using a base of ingredients that don't need to be refrigerated, so they make eating on the go easier than ever. If you find yourself running from visits, to church, to staff meetings and more without time for a fresh meal, try this easy alternative.

### Ingredients:

- 1 – 6 oz. can packed tuna in water
- 1 - 7 oz. can chick peas
- 1 avocado
- 1 mango
- Salt and pepper to taste
- 2 teaspoons Ponzu dressing or a combination of 1 teaspoon soy sauce and 1 teaspoon lemon juice

This can be served over rice or lettuce, or eaten as-is.

### Directions:

1. Drain tuna and chick peas.
2. Slice avocado and mango.
3. Combine all ingredients in large bowl.
4. Season with salt, pepper and dressing.
5. Enjoy!

Don't forget to keep a can opener in your car, or buy pop-top cans.



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CONNECTING ELEMENTS OF WELL-BEING

Dimensions  
Newsletter



## It's Time to Get Back to the Doctor

Among the endless things different about 2020, there has been a massive decrease in the number of non-urgent health care services. The biggest reductions have been physicians' office visits, preventive care, dental care, non-urgent procedures and cardiac care.\*

Now that we are more than seven months into the COVID-19 pandemic, it's time to talk to your providers about getting back to your regular care schedule. Wellness visits, vaccinations, age-appropriate screenings, dental cleanings and basic health maintenance, can all be done with relatively low risk. In fact, the risk of putting it off may be much greater than the risk of going.

Health care providers are taking a number of precautions to help keep you safe while you receive routine care, including:

1. Offering telemedicine services, when appropriate
2. Screening patients for fever, COVID-exposure history, and other signs of infection
3. Checking visitors in from the car and having forms completed online before arriving to minimize waiting room exposure
4. Mask and social distancing requirements for patients
5. Mask, gloves, and other appropriate personal protective equipment requirements for health care providers
6. Diligent cleaning/sanitization procedures

You can take care of yourself without jeopardizing your safety—so don't delay. Encourage children and elders to do the same. And don't forget to get your flu shot!

*\* Based on data from Willis Towers Watson*



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**Dimensions  
Newsletter**



## Zoom Shortcuts

Video meetings are something we've all had to do more of in 2020. Zoom is one popular platform used by many. We have researched Zoom shortcuts to make your life a bit easier and help you navigate online meetings like a pro.

For PC users, try the following keyboard commands:

1. Alt + I: Quick Invite
2. Alt + R: Record Meeting (Alt+P: to pause/resume recording)
3. Alt+Shift+S: Share Screen (Alt+T to pause/resume sharing)
4. Alt + A: Mute Audio
5. Alt+V: Turn Off Video
6. Alt+M: Mute Everyone



One additional tip that we think is useful is: Disable Waiting Room. The Zoom "waiting room" feature requires you to admit each attendee individually. You can turn this setting off under Settings > In Meeting (Advanced) > Waiting room.

And not that you need it, but just for fun you can go to Settings > Video, check "Touch up my appearance," and Zoom will soften the focus on your camera, theoretically minimizing any issues with your skin.

If you use Slack, you can start Zoom meetings right from Slack. Just type "/zoom" in Slack to see all the options.

If you use GoToMeeting™ instead, [check out this webinar](https://lp.logmeininc.com/goto-webinar-5-keys-to-make-remote-work-work-thanks.html?mkt_tok=eyJpIjoiTIRkbVIUUXhOamt3TmptkaylsInQiOiJcl1JwUk53OWI4NVA1TmFFcGZlQ1QrcGQ4NU5SR2ZUMGU1TU9IMnRYbz) ([https://lp.logmeininc.com/goto-webinar-5-keys-to-make-remote-work-work-thanks.html?mkt\\_tok=eyJpIjoiTIRkbVIUUXhOamt3TmptkaylsInQiOiJcl1JwUk53OWI4NVA1TmFFcGZlQ1QrcGQ4NU5SR2ZUMGU1TU9IMnRYbz](https://lp.logmeininc.com/goto-webinar-5-keys-to-make-remote-work-work-thanks.html?mkt_tok=eyJpIjoiTIRkbVIUUXhOamt3TmptkaylsInQiOiJcl1JwUk53OWI4NVA1TmFFcGZlQ1QrcGQ4NU5SR2ZUMGU1TU9IMnRYbz)) including new research and tips for at-home workers.



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Dimensions  
Newsletter



## All Your Benefits, All in One Place—The New and Improved Benefits Access

Our lives are filled with so many tasks that create more work for us—accessing all of your Wespath benefits shouldn't be one of them.

With Benefits Access, HealthFlex/WebMD, EY and many other websites, it can be difficult to remember where or how to access your Wespath benefits and services. That changes later this year, when the new and improved Benefits Access becomes your single sign-on website for all your retirement, health, well-being, life and disability benefits.

Want to check your Virgin PulseCash balance or use an EY financial calculator? Need to verify your medical coverage or check on a prescription with OptumRx? The new Benefits Access will take you directly to these websites.

Recent updates to the design and navigation of Benefits Access make it easier to use on your computer and mobile devices. With the new Benefits Access, you will still enjoy the improved site design and navigation with the added ability to see a summary of all your Wespath benefits and detailed benefits information together in one place. Benefits information will be right at your fingertips, whether you're at home or on the go.

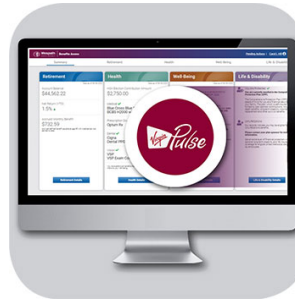
If your conference does not sponsor HealthFlex or the Wespath well-being programs, such as Virgin Pulse, Benefits Access will still provide you direct access to your retirement account summaries, projection tools, investment information and EY Financial Planning Services.

HealthFlex participants will still complete Annual Election via the HealthFlex/WebMD site in 2020, but they will be able to access all of their health plan needs (including Annual Election) through Benefits Access beginning next year.

We are committed to improving your online experience and empowering you to take control of and use your benefits to their full potential. We hope you'll see the new Benefits Access is another step in keeping that commitment.

The way you log into Benefits Access will stay the same. Simply use your current Benefits Access login credentials at [benefitsaccess.org](https://benefitsaccess.org). Not registered yet? Sign-up today!

See a preview of the new Benefits Access, learn more about the improvements being made, and view FAQs by visiting our dedicated webpage at [wespath.org/r/thenewBA](https://wespath.org/r/thenewBA) (<https://www.wespath.org/r/thenewBA>).



**DIMENSIONS**  
CONNECTING ELEMENTS OF WELL-BEING

**Dimensions  
Newsletter**





[Retirement & Investments >](#)

[Health & Well-Being >](#)

[For Plan Sponsors >](#)

[About Wespath >](#)

## Coming Soon: *Saving Grace* Seeks to Help Clergy and Congregations Find a Path to Financial Well-Being

The global pandemic has added to the financial stress experienced across United Methodist churches and congregations—the feeling of financial uncertainty is familiar to many. *Saving Grace: A Guide for Financial Well-Being* is a new educational curriculum that seeks to support and strengthen clergy and congregations with a Wesleyan guide to improved financial planning. This program, created by Abingdon Press in collaboration with Wespath's Clergy Financial Well-Being Initiative, will be available in early November 2020. We hope this curriculum serves the denomination as a way to connect finance and faith, and help many regain control of their finances and achieve their personal goals. For more information about the program, including a brief video overview, [please click here](https://abingdonpress.lpages.co/saving-grace/) (<https://abingdonpress.lpages.co/saving-grace/>).



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Newsletter