

Could you be going through a midlife crisis?

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Credit: Vera Kratochvil/public domain

Is a midlife crisis real, or is it a common myth that you may feel significant uncertainty or discontent at a certain point in your adult life?

"People often wonder if someone can have a midlife crisis," says Jennifer Wickham, a licensed professional counselor for Mayo Clinic Health System. "It's a good question to ask, as all of us go through personal issues and transitions in our lives."

The term "midlife crisis" was coined in 1965 by Dr. Elliot Jacques, a Canadian psychoanalyst, to describe challenges during the normal period of transition and self-reflection many adults experience from age 40 to 60. During these years, adults may commonly question who they are in this world and in their life, what their purpose is, and how have they used their time thus far. These questions can be triggered by the realization of the passage of time or changes that may occur with the physical body, such as a health scare or a diminished ability to perform physical tasks.

"Your [midlife crisis](#), or transition, may occur around significant life events, such your youngest child moving away or finishing college," says Wickham. "You may feel it when you're entering a new decade or after the death of a parent."

Wickham explains the emotions these questions and changes prompt may cause you discomfort, stress and confusion, and may lead you to feel that you are in a crisis. Despite this stress, you might experience this time as the beginning of a new and exciting stage of life.

Occasionally, midlife transitions might invoke depression, and Wickham says it's important you recognize these symptoms if you're not feeling quite like yourself:

- Have your eating or sleeping habits changed, or are you feeling tired and run-down?
- Do you have feelings of pessimism or hopelessness?
- Do you have feelings of restlessness, anxiety or irritability?
- Are you feeling a loss of interest in activities that you once enjoyed, including sex and hobbies?

- Are you having thoughts of suicide or attempts at suicide?
- Do you have physical symptoms, such as headaches or other physical aches or pains, that don't respond to treatment?

Wickham offers tips to help:

- Stay active.
- Go for daily walks and get some fresh air.
- Stay social.
- Stay engaged with friends and family.
- Meditate.
- Take a yoga course.

"Though this is a normal transition of adult development, if you or a loved one believes that you are engaging in out-of-character behavior or making sudden changes to major life areas, such as work or relationships, it can be helpful to seek the support of a professional," adds Wickham.

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