



FAMILY CAREGIVER NEWSLETTER NOVEMBER 2011

Support Group and Event Information Inside

THE POWERFUL CAREGIVER

This column is named after the class "Powerful Tools for Caregivers", a six-session workshop on helping caregiving families thrive (not just survive). It is offered in Racine County several times a year

CAREGIVERS DESERVE HEALTH, HOPE, HAPPINESS And HONOR!!

Dear Family Caregiver,

Before you begin reading this newsletter, please pat yourself on the back, look in the mirror, and say, "I am a marvelous person doing a job of great importance!" Why?, because November is National Family Caregiver Month. And because like the caregivers in the following stories, YOU are the backbone of the long-term healthcare system in America! Now take a deep breath, relax, and read on.

Paul is a 52-year-old art teacher whose father has Lewy Body Dementia. Two years ago, Paul quit his job, said goodbye to all his friends, and moved a thousand miles to live with his dad. At first Paul thought that for a couple of years and then return to the life he had known. Now, however, the caregiving situation seems to drag on. He is often impatient with his dad, who is extremely slow and awkward with even the simplest activities of daily living. He also falls frequently and wakes up during the night sleepwalking. Once Paul found his dad on the porch at 2 AM with the car key in his hand! Paul feels isolated, and eaten up by caregiving. He has gained considerable weight. He hasn't thought to see a doctor for himself since his move. He doesn't exercise, and he eats mostly pizza and frozen meals. He knows something needs to change in his life. What can he do?

Juanita is an 83-year-old retired hospital kitchen worker. Her husband Carlos is 85 and has had diabetes for many years. He has sores on his feet and low vision. Juanita takes care of Carlos with some help from her daughter. Carlos needs glucose checks and insulin, other medications and eye drops, specially prepared meals, foot care, help with bathing, dressing, etc., and many medical appointments. Juanita cooks nutritious meals for Carlos, but she is often too tired or too hurried to eat. She has less and less energy. Most days she has a headache. She tells herself it's "just nerves" and tries to calm down. She often wakes at night, worried and tense. She misses her grandchildren out West. She cries a lot, mostly at night when Carlos is asleep. She is often impatient, and then feels guilty.

Family caregivers are among the fastest-growing populations in America today. Who are you? A person who becomes a caregiver may be a 90-year-old great-grandmother, a middle-aged stock broker, a high school student, or a newly-retired traveler. Perhaps you are a spouse, son, niece, or granddaughter of someone who is chronically ill, disabled, or elderly. You have probably given up something in order to play this role – e.g. a job, free time, a hobby, financial security, or health insurance. Hopefully, you are gaining something - wisdom, patience, a chance to repay a loved one, communication skills, or other life lessons.

Whatever your path, the greatest skill you can learn is that of self-care. In fact your survival and your loved one's well-being depend on it! Family caregiving is a hazardous occupation. It brings chronic stress that may last a decade or more. Stress hormones play havoc with the human body and psyche. Many care providers refer to a "Caregiver Syndrome" that may involve high blood pressure, stroke, heart disease, diabetes, clinical depression, and other serious stress-related illnesses.

Following is a list of building blocks essential to good health, with some cues for building them into your foundation of daily life. I hope you'll find at least one small change you can make for your health and well-being.

NUTRITION

Regular meals with a variety of natural, colorful foods

HYDRATION

"Just drink water!" 4-8 glasses a day

EXERCISE

90 minutes per week, in small "snacks" if necessary. Walks, exercise video, climbing stairs, dancing, yoga, etc.

RELAXATION

Deep, slow breathing, soothing music, creative visualization (imagining a relaxing situation in detail)

SLEEP

You need 7-9 hours a day. If you are unable to get that much, get help with caregiving and/or have a medical check-up.

GOOD BREATHING

As much fresh air as possible. Purposeful deep belly breaths at least three times a day.

TIME WITH A SUPPORTIVE PERSON

Face-to-face visits with friends, caregiver support groups, telephone calls, email, caregiver websites, Facebook, Twitter, Skype, etc.

HUMOR

Watch or listen to comedies, look for humor in daily life, read funny stuff, watch squirrels in your yard and imagine what they might be thinking! Collect things that make you laugh,

HEALTH SCREENING

Visit your health care provider at least once a year. Follow up with recommended tests, medications, therapies and treatments. **MAKE SURE YOUR PROVIDER KNOWS YOU ARE A CAREGIVER AND UNDERSTANDS CAREGIVER SYNDROME!**

POSITIVE THINKING

Practice gratitude and hope! Read Daily Comforts for Caregivers, available from the ADRC (call 638-6800).

RESPIRE CARE (TAKE A BREAK!)

Every caregiver needs time away! Use day programs, friends and relatives who want to help, or care facilities for a few days.

After caregiving is over, most healthy caregivers say they are glad they did this job. These are usually the ones who have practiced healthy habits and used community resources. So please, please take good care of yourself. **YOU MATTER A LOT!**

Now let's see what changes Paul and Juanita can make.

Paul contacts the Aging and Disability Resource, learns about options in the community, and speaks with a Caregiver Support Specialist. He is encouraged to get help, especially at night and address his father's sleep disturbances with a doctor. Paul hires a nighttime caregiver three nights a week. He also takes his dad to an Adult Day program several days a week. Best of all, he finds out about the, SPARK program, which has art activities for people with dementia and their caregivers. Paul uses his newfound "free time" to exercise, reconnect with some old friends, and begin painting again. He visits a doctor and learns that he has borderline diabetes. He begins eating a healthy diet; picks up his exercise routine; and begins to look for humor in reading, movies, and the world around him. Paul begins to feel that his life is worthwhile again!

Juanita visits her doctor with (encouragement from her daughter). It turns out she has depression and high blood pressure. The doctor prescribes some medications and suggests that Juanita see a counselor, get a break from caregiving, and develop healthy lifestyle habits. Juanita visits the ADRC and the Veterans' Service Officer. She finds that Carlos is eligible for some help with his activities e.g. bathing. He also qualifies for a week-long respite stay at a care facility, and Juanita gets to visit her grandchildren! Juanita and Paul both attend Caregiver Support Groups as often as they can to exchange ideas and receive encouragement.

Community Resources for Caregiving Families

This column highlights some of the many resources in our community. For more, see the [Community Resource Directory](#) available from the Aging and Disability Resource Center (638-6800 or www.adrc.racineco.com)

Adult Day Care Services – See the Community Resource Director, Page 28.

Veterans' Services – There are many services available to veterans of the US military who have served in peace time or during a conflict. There are various programs and requirements and an application process. Your best bet is to call the Racine County Veterans' Service Officer (**262-638-6702**) for accurate information and help with the process. Some of the benefits require the veteran to have a Primary Care Provider at a VA Clinic. We are fortunate to have such a clinic in our county.

National Family Caregivers Association – This organization first set aside November to honor family caregivers. It was founded over 30 years ago by two family caregivers. It has advocated for family caregivers at the national level. Co-founder Susan Mintz was instrumental in getting funding for the National Family Caregiver Support Program, through which Caregiver Support Specialists are hired. Family caregivers can join the association FREE. You can be in touch with caregivers in similar circumstances and read the newsletter [Take Care](#) for good information. Call **1-800-896-3650** or visit www.thefamilycaregiver.org to join

SUPPORT GROUPS FOR FAMILY CAREGIVERS

Need someone to stay with your care receiver while you attend a support group or class?
Call 262-638-6678 to learn about free respite care.

First Friday 10:30AM-12Noon

Alzheimer's Association Group – NOV 4
For Families Dealing with Alzheimer's and other Dementia

Lincoln Lutheran Office Building, 2000 Domanik Drive
4th Floor (Enter through door on west side of building)

Second Tuesday 1:30-3:00 PM – **NOV. 8**

Yorkville United Methodist Church
17645 Old Yorkville Rd., Union Grove
(3 Miles West of I-94, just North of Hwy. 20)

Second Saturday 10:30AM–12N **NOV 12**
Mt. Pleasant Lutheran Church, 1700 S. Green Bay Road

Third Wednesday 1:30-3:00 PM **NOV 16**
Burlington Senior Center, Eppers Room, 209 N. Main Street,

Third Thursday, NOV. 17

Lunch Hour (12 to 1) “Brown Bag” group:
1717 Taylor Ave., County Service Bldg., 3 South Conference Room
Alzheimer’s Association Group 6:00-7:30 PM
Mount Pleasant Lutheran Church, 1700 S. Green Bay Road
1700 S. Green Bay Road

OTHER EVENTS FOR CAREGIVING FAMILIES

The Role of Music in Dementia Care---It’s Magic!
Nov. 3rd 6-8 PM
(See Flyer)

“Conversations Between Generations”
November 16th, 6:30-7:45 PM

A workshop designed for adult children concerned about their parents’ present and future needs and wishes. (See Flyer)

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