



FAMILY CAREGIVER NEWSLETTER

JANUARY 2012

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

Controlling the Spread of Infection

Ellen cares for her husband Jack. Last winter was terrible for them. Jack caught a cold and then developed pneumonia. He was in the hospital for a week, and Ellen, after driving through snow and ice each day and getting precious little sleep, ended up with "walking pneumonia" herself. It was awful being sick and exhausted and cooped up. Jack has not regained his former strength. Ellen wonders how they can avoid such a predicament again. She may find something helpful in the following words.

During the winter months, caregivers, as well as those they care for, are prone to infectious conditions. The weather is cold and damp, people tend to get less exercise and fresh air, fresh foods are more expensive, and it's difficult to drink enough water in the dry indoor atmosphere. Stress levels soar as we deal with snow, cold and isolation. Neglect of healthy habits and the effects of stress hormones are marks of an ideal "host" to a germ!

Germs are microscopic organisms that cause disease. A host in this case is the body in whom a germ takes up residence. Most germs consist of just one cell, which can easily divide to create two germs. Germs have nothing to do but eat and replicate themselves day and night. This takes place in our bodies much more than we would like to think! In healthy circumstances our body defenses can conquer the invaders; however, when those defenses are impaired, germs invade body tissues, causing disease.

Germs enter the human host through normal body openings and through open sores or injuries. The mouth and respiratory tract are very common points of entry for these winter rascals. In their quest to find new "hosts", germs have some efficient but unknowing allies: hands, food and liquids; body fluids (coughs, sneezes, saliva, elimination, etc.); surfaces e.g. bathroom appliances or dirty laundry; doctors' office waiting rooms; and children! It behooves us to know how to fend off attacks! Here are some "coats of armor" we can wear:

Good health habits – A balanced diet of varied, colorful foods as fresh and natural as possible. You may want to consult a care provider regarding helpful supplements if you feel you are not getting adequate nutrients. Try to drink six glasses of water a day. Exercise, one and a half hours a week, if possible. Rest eight hours every day (if you are unable to do so, you need help. Please see next page). Plan meaningful interactions with other human beings every day. All these healthy habits help you to fight disease.

Effective Hand-washing: It's important how you do this! Please see the accompanying flyer. When you don't have access to soap and water, you can use a liquid sanitizer. Apply it to your hands and allow it to air dry.

Gloves – for when you need to (clean up or.....) fluids or handle soiled laundry. Inexpensive examination gloves are widely available at pharmacies and other stores. For those who have sensitive skin, latex-free gloves are available. The flyer shows how to remove soiled gloves without contaminating your hands. NOTE: Use proper hand-washing technique even when using gloves.

Intact Skin – our first defense against infection. Cover cracks and open sores. Prevent pressure areas on a person with compromised mobility by making sure skin surfaces are clean and dry and by changing position often to prevent pressure on one area.

Immunizations - preventive measures which introduce the immune system to a tiny dose of certain germs, triggering the production of “designer cells” to fight those organisms. People with chronic conditions and their caregivers are considered especially susceptible to infection and in need of immunizations. Please see the flyer for recommended immunizations for you.

Antibiotics -When bacterial infection does occur, an antibiotic is often needed to assist the body's defense system in killing germs. It's important to understand some particulars about an antibiotic: whether or not it should be taken with food; foods to avoid while taking it; what times of day it should be taken; and how it should be stored (some need refrigeration). Taken properly, the right antibiotic, along with extra rest and fluids, can usually put a person on the road to recovery in a few days.

There may be some bumps in that road, though. Antibiotics kill certain types of organisms indiscriminately, so they may deplete the digestive system of the “good bacteria” that aid normal digestion and elimination. When this happens, diarrhea can result until the normal balance is restored. Probiotics help replace the “good bacteria”. Some people have found it helpful to eat foods, e.g. yogurt to prevent probiotic depletion. Another bump in the road is when an invading organism forms a mutation that makes it immune to the antibiotic. If this happens, the ill person may not get better or may take a turn for the worse. Then a different prescription may be needed in order to achieve victory over the giant problems those tiny germs have caused.

When it comes to infection, “An ounce of prevention is (surely) worth a pound of cure.”

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)

Some sources of help for caregivers who need time to care for themselves properly:

Day Respite Programs – Harmony Club – for those who can take care of their own physical and medication needs; and Adult Day Services – for those who need more assistance with self-care or medical needs. (See Community Resource Directory)

Home Health Agencies – Trained and screened health aides come into the home and help with such tasks as bathing and caring for the care receiver as well as meal preparation and light housekeeping if needed. Cost is around \$20 per hour; workers are screened and supervised by agency staff. (See Community Resource Directory)

Private Caregivers; with varied training and experience, these service providers are usually less costly than agencies. Consumers are responsible for supervision and screening.

Care Team – People may have said to you: “Call me if you ever need anything.” They really want to help, but they don’t know exactly what to offer and you aren’t sure what you can reasonably ask. Senior Services can help organize a group of people who care about you and your loved one into a team providing help and support tailored to your situation. In Racine County we have seen several effective care teams. One was composed mostly of a caregiver’s friends; another consisted of some of the care receiver’s former co-workers. Helpful people can be found in many places. And helpful people need someone willing to accept their assistance. That kind of human connection makes life meaningful. And for these difficult economic times, this is a cost-effective plan, too. For more information, call Ruth Stauersbol at 833-8762.

SUPPORT GROUPS FOR FAMILY CAREGIVERS

First Friday 10:30AM-12Noon

Alzheimer’s Association Group – **January 6**
For Families Dealing with Alzheimer’s and other Dementias
Lincoln Lutheran Office Building, 2000 Domanik Drive, 4th Floor

Second Tuesday 1:30-3:00 pm
Yorkville United Methodist Church
17645 Old Yorkville Rd.

January 20

(3 Miles West of I-94, Just N. of Highway 20)

Second Saturday 10:30AM–12N

January 14

Mount Pleasant Lutheran Church, 1700 S. Green Bay Road

Third Wednesday 1:30-3:00 PM

January 18

Burlington Senior Center, Eppers Room, 209 N. Main Street

Third Thursday 6:00-7:30 PM

Alzheimer's Association Group

January 19

For Families Dealing with Alzheimer's and other Dementias

Mount Pleasant Lutheran Church, 1700 S. Green Bay Road

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OTHER EVENTS FOR CAREGIVING FAMILIES

Two Winter Offerings from the Alzheimer's Association

Understanding Dementia – Three sessions beginning January 6th

Savvy Caregiver – Six sessions beginning February 16th

Facilitated by Paulette Kisse, Outreach Specialist

Please see accompanying flyers for description and registration information

*May the New Year bring you health, happiness, and reminders that flowers will again
spring from the earth as life renews itself.*

Marilyn Joyce, BA, RN, Caregiver Support Specialist

Racine County Aging and Disability Resource Center

Phone: 262-833-8764

ADRC main phone number: 262-638-6800