



WELLNESS

Wellness Monthly

Healthy matters to keep in mind.

February 2010

This Month's Topic:

CAREGIVERS NEED CARE, TOO

Caregiving is often an act of love that can be rewarding — whether it's caring for a family member with an illness, parenting a child with disabilities, or caring for a frail or elderly parent. But caregiving can be stressful and exhausting, too. It may be tempting to "go it alone," but everyone benefits when the caregiver learns to take care of himself or herself first.

Sharing the Lead

No caregiver should try to do it all, day in and day out. At first, asking for help may feel like admitting failure, especially when caring for a loved one. But family members and friends are usually happy to help. There are also community-based resources that can offer support. Sometimes people just need to be told how to help. Here's where the Internet can come in handy. The caregiver can set up a care team using Web sites such as www.lotsahelpinghands.com and www.carerunner.com. Make a list of needs: meal delivery, light housework, errands and childcare, just to name a few. Team members can sign up and manage scheduling online.

Caring for Body, Mind, Spirit

Sometimes caregivers get so involved with the details of providing good care that they forget about their own well-being. It is important to practice self-care. Start with a healthy diet, plenty of exercise, and daily rest. To process the many thoughts, frustrations and joys that come with this important job, the caregiver may enjoy writing in a journal, talking to a spiritual counselor or attending support group meetings. Treats are important too: a massage, a walk in the park, a meal in a special restaurant, or anything that makes the caregiver feel special. It might feel selfish to ask for daily private time. But experts agree that personal refreshment is important. It can be something as simple as taking a break to read a book, enjoy a favorite hobby, or spend time with a trusted friend.

Creating Healthy Boundaries

There is a fine line between care giving and enabling. You may feel you have no right to say, "no" to a request or demand made by a loved one. But doing everything for a loved one can get in the way of their recovery (and it can be exhausting for you). It is important to establish healthy boundaries. In a way, it's like letting a toddler walk on his own. There may be a few bumps in the road, but encouraging your loved one to do things for themselves can help with their recovery.

Nurturing Relationships

It is important to cherish time together beyond the roles of caregiver and recipient. Find special moments for the other parts of the relationship: parent/child, husband/wife, grandparent/grandchild. Spouses, partners and friends are often standing by to give and receive love. They can provide extra support for the caregiver during difficult times. Being the primary caregiver for a person who is sick or has a disability is never easy, but you don't have to do it alone. UBH is here to help. Call or log on any time for help with any of life's challenges.

When the Caregiver is Depressed

The Family Caregivers Alliance estimates that 20% of family caregivers suffer from depression. That's twice the rate of the general population. Experiencing at least five of the following symptoms for a two-week period is a signal to get help:

- Loss of interest in activities that once gave pleasure
- Change in eating habits that result in unwanted weight gain or loss
- Feeling tired all the time
- Sleeping too much or not enough
- Feelings of inappropriate guilt
- Feelings of worthlessness, hopelessness or helplessness
- Feelings of low self-esteem
- Excessive irritability, tendency toward angry outbursts
- Difficulty concentrating or making decisions
- Thoughts of death or suicide; attempted suicide

Depression is a serious illness and requires treatment, so don't wait. If you or someone you know has these symptoms, contact a medical professional or call UBH.

Resources:

Use the search phrase "caregiving" for further tips on taking care of yourself while caring for others.

Employee Assistance Program (EAP): United Behavioral Health (UBH)

Toll-free number: 1-866-248-4105 (7 days/24 hours)

Access code: 61570

www.liveandworkwell.com

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