

The Caregiver's

Home Companion

"Helping Those Who Help Others"

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This Month Online

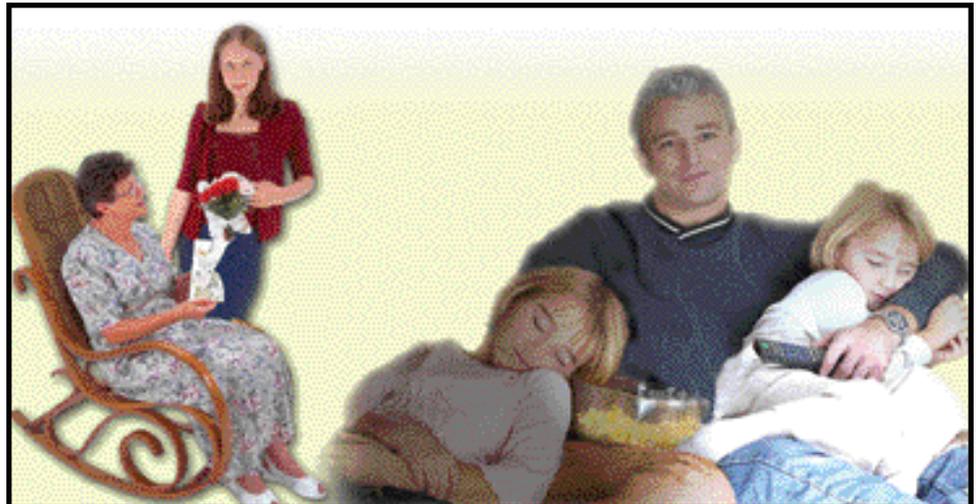
Have you checked out the extensive archive of information articles at our online website www.caregivershome.com?

The Caregivers Home archive is now over 250 stories. More are added every week. You can use the site "search" command to identify important topics and review the pertinent article or articles, hopefully to help ease your caregiving challenge by arming yourself with the information you need.

Back issues of this newsletter are also available to you, as a subscriber, online at our site. After logging in (a requirement), just click on the screen-top News & Info tab and then click on **Monthly Newsletters** to browse the back issues you may have missed.

Caught Between Your Partner and Loved One When Caregiving Interferes with Your Personal Relationship

By Ursula Furi-Perry



Caregivers know all too well that personal relationships are hard to juggle when caring for a loved one. After a long day of caring for an ailing family member and tending to other responsibilities, not much time is left for romance or even conversation. Caregivers who are married or in a committed relationship may find themselves neglecting their commitments as their marriage or personal relationship is sidelined while caring for an aging loved one.

Just how does caregiving affect personal relationships? How can caregivers prevent unnecessary stress in their marriage or relationships? How can spouses and partners of caregivers help?

The continuous absence of a spouse or partner may strain a relationship. "Non-caregiving spouses can get resentful that someone else takes priority in their spouses' life, that they aren't 'any fun' anymore, that they are more

tired or less available for intimacy and doing things together, that meal times may be different," says Donna Schempp, LCSW, program director of the Family Caregiver Alliance. "For example, the care receiver may be present at a meal and the caregiver spouse (must) feed the care receiver before settling in to eat."

Spouses of caregivers may feel neglected, as if their partners have disappeared from the marriage. "Many caregivers don't know how to care for themselves, let alone their spouses," says Gail Mitchell, president and founder of the National Organization for Empowering Caregivers. "When one half of a couple is caring for a loved one, that couple will often experience more friction and tension in the relationship." And unnecessary tension can wreak havoc on any marriage. "The couple may even lose all

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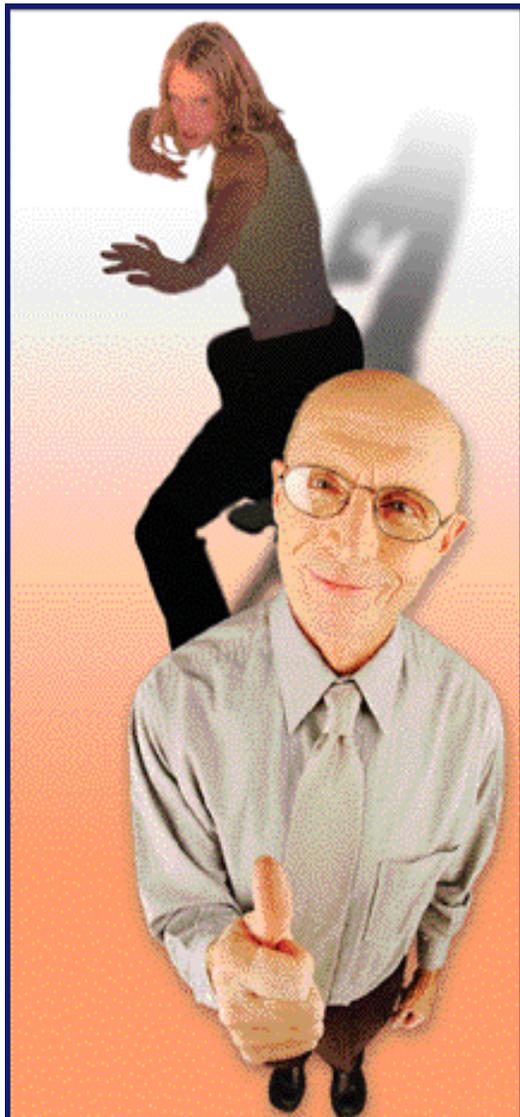
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The Caregiver's Home Companion is produced by caregivers and professional healthcare workers. While this publication is not intended as a substitute for professionally administered medical advice, the editorial suggestions, advice and tips included in this newsletter have been tested and reviewed by an individual or organization involved in caring for elderly or other aged ones. The Caregiver's Home Companion also strives to obtain the input of educators and researchers in all branches of medical and scientific research. We welcome your comments and suggestions at editor@caregivershome.com.

Seven Steps to Sanity

How to Effectively Deal With Aging Parents Who Push Your Buttons

By Dr. Dale Atkins



Unfortunately, we all know the uncomfortable feeling of having our buttons perfectly pushed by our parents, (after all, they installed them!), and we know equally well the failure we have in controlling our reactions to this act. Our goal is to remain as even-tempered as we can.

Our folks bait us and we react. This dance seems so deeply engrained in our psyche that our reactions—good or bad—are often unconscious.

What I am suggesting is this: At the

moment those basic physical changes kick in, look upon them in an entirely new way. See them as a good thing, a signal from your body letting you know that you are under siege. They are not a signal that you are out of control, but an affirmation that you are *in* control. Use these feelings to feel strong rather than weak.

Actively carve out a small, calm space for yourself between your parents' provocation and your response, and you will already be headed in a healthier direction. This interlude may be short, but it is crucial. It is within these few fleeting moments that your efforts to re-work your relationship with your parents will truly be born, and your caregiving will be enhanced. There is a great deal that must be accomplished in this small period of time, so it makes sense to have a plan for when it happens.

At first, these steps may take more time than is "natural" (be prepared to maintain silence longer than you do ordinarily, in order to execute each of these steps fully), but as you train yourself to separate your parents' provocation from your normal response, you will be able to go through the steps faster and faster. Soon it will become second nature, replacing your original, destructive pattern entirely.

Here are the steps:

STEP 1: Isolate the provocative statement or action from your parent.

STEP 2: Your physical signs kick in.

STEP 3: Acknowledge them silently.

STEP 4: Analyze what your parent wants and why.

STEP 5: Decide what the productive response is.

STEP 6: Display that response.

STEP 7: Move on to neutral territory.

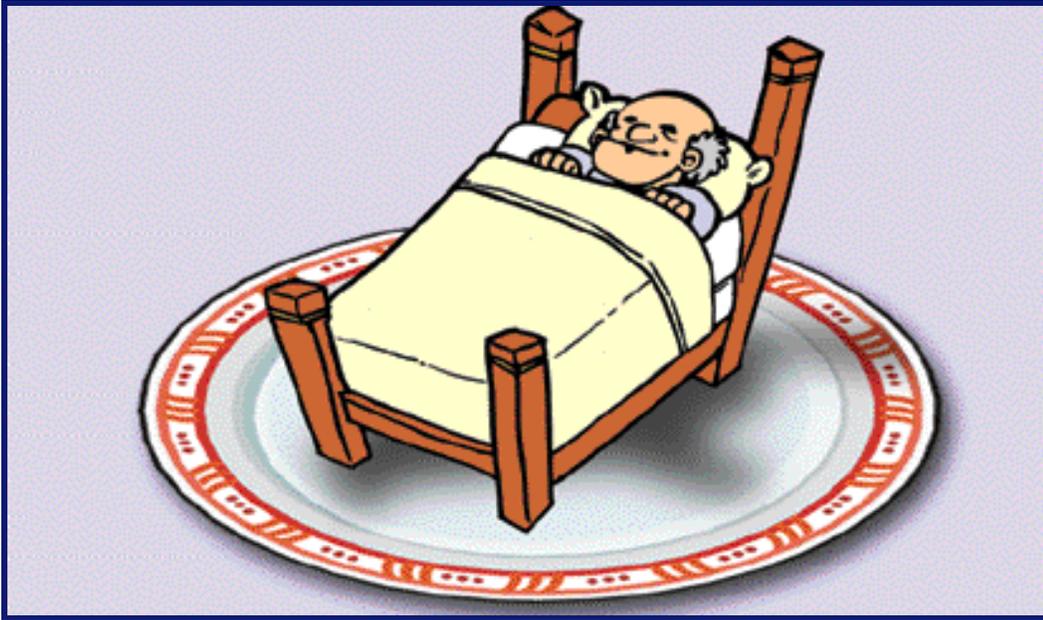
For these steps to work, you must be emotionally detached. You are just an observer isolating their actions or statements (Step 1). Some of us have many issues with our parents, but you must concentrate on the provocations that REALLY get to you.

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Diet and Nutrition

Eating Your Way to a Good Night's Sleep

By Sharon Palmer, RD



Does the evening bring bouts of sleeplessness for the one you care for? And while we're on the topic, do you find yourself counting sheep at midnight, praying for a few hours of shut-eye to recharge your batteries for the next day's onslaught of tasks?

Join the crowd. Studies suggest that about one third of American adults experience insomnia each year, with 10%-20% of us reporting severe sleeplessness.

Insomnia occurs more frequently in women than in men, and to further complicate things, sleep quality deteriorates as we age. In women, hormonal events can disturb sleep. Experts think that once women have children, they may develop a high sensitivity to environmental disturbances often resulting in sleeplessness. This condition seems to extend throughout life for many women, even after their children have grown and left the nest.

As we age, sleeplessness becomes routine business. One study found that on average a 60-year-old awakens 22 times during a night compared to a young person who awakens about 10 times per night. Complaints of insomnia are remarkably higher in people over age 65 than in those aged 18-34.

Many factors keep the elderly burning the midnight oil. They may be more sensitive to environmental distractions like noise and light, medical conditions that cause pain or distress may affect their sleep, dementia can

cause disorientation and wandering, prescription drugs may produce insomnia, and stressors such as grief, depression, and anxiety go hand in hand with sleeplessness.

Like your elder, you can find yourself in the same tossing-and-turning boat, struggling for a peaceful night of slumber. Many of the same sleep-depriving factors present in the elderly, from anxiety to sleep distractions, may be seen in the life of the caregiver, preventing you from getting a good night of sleep. But before you peer into the depths of a sleeping pill bottle, there may be some things in your diet and lifestyle that can improve your chances of getting some well deserved rest.

First, it's important to discuss any sleep problems with your physician. Only 30% of adults discuss their sleep issues with their doctor, turning their back on an important avenue of health advice and support in the world of sleeplessness. Once this is done, here are some nutrition and lifestyle tips that may promote better sleep.

Kick the late night caffeine habit. Keep an eye on your clock. As it approaches 4 – 6 hours before bedtime, limit caffeine intake. Coffee, tea, chocolate and caffeinated colas are all examples of caffeinated foods and drinks. If a bedtime cup of tea has always been your nocturnal routine, try herbal or decaffeinated teas.

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Timely Tip:

Check out the federal government's new website location for A-to-Z information of the new Medicare prescription discount drug card. The site is a good reference point for information on the program and features medication price comparisons for caregivers to make the wisest choices on behalf of their elderly. The site will eventually allow seniors to choose from 48 discount cards for various drug categories, including 27 available nationally to all eligible Medicare beneficiaries. Information about the prescription drug benefit discount card is available in the "Prescription Drug and Other Assistance Programs" section at www.medicare.gov

Eating Your Way to a Good Night's Sleep

Continued from Page 3

Don't spice up your sleep life. Spices like pepper and chili powder can contribute to sleep problems

No nighttime smoking. Nicotine is a stimulant, so smoking a cigarette right before bedtime is not a good idea if you'd like to get a good night of sleep.

No little nightcaps before bedtime. Alcohol and other depressants suppress REM sleep, which may produce more night awakenings. Avoiding alcoholic beverages within two hours of bedtime might be the way to win a night of peaceful slumber. Never mix alcohol and sleeping pills.

Go easy on dinner. Avoid eating large meals at nighttime, as digestion may be prolonged resulting in poor sleep. Try eating your largest meal for lunch and switch to a light, low fat dinner that will be easier to digest.

Don't spice up your sleep life. Spices like pepper and chili powder can contribute to sleep problems due to heartburn and indigestion. Gassy foods, such as cabbage, broccoli, garlic, and dried beans, may cause abdominal discomfort resulting in sleeplessness. Try to reserve spicy and gassy foods for before noon to allow time for digestion, and make sure to eat your evening meal in a relaxed setting with thorough chewing.

Snack on serotonin. A small high-carbohydrate snack, such as crackers, cereal, bread, or fruit can trigger the brain to release serotonin, which may help you sleep. The fabled glass of warm milk before bedtime may provide a carbohydrate dose along with a relaxing, soothing sensation to curb the stomach growls and produce sleepiness.

Turning to tryptophan. Some people find that foods containing a natural source of tryptophan are a sleep aid. Tryptophan is an amino acid that converts to serotonin in the brain and occurs naturally in foods such as bananas, dried dates, milk, cottage cheese, meat, fish, turkey and peanuts. More study is needed to validate tryptophan's effectiveness as a sleep aid. Tryptophan supplements were linked to an illness outbreak in 1989 that resulted in 30 deaths. Since then, consumers have been cautioned to avoid consuming tryptophan supplements.



Melatonin. Melatonin is a hormone produced by the pineal gland in the human brain that controls the body's circadian rhythm, the internal clock that tells us when to sleep and when to rise. Many health experts agree that more research is needed on melatonin supplements before they can be recommended as a safe, effective sleep aid. The National Sleep Foundation cautions consumers that even though some studies appear to support the use of melatonin as a sleep aid, nightly use of melatonin supplements might lead to levels of melatonin in the blood stream that exceed natural levels by 1,000 times. As with any supplement, if you choose to try melatonin, discuss

it with your doctor to make sure that it does not interfere with any medical condition or medication you are currently taking.

Valerian for victory over insomnia. Valerian is an herb that has a long history of use as a sleep aid, as it may depress the central nervous system to produce a mild tranquilizing effect. As with many supplements, additional research is needed to determine appropriate dosages and side effects of valerian.

Exercise for sleepiness. Physical activity is an important method of coping with stress and it physically tires the body so that it can better wind down for a good rest. But avoid bouts of exercise within three hours of bedtime, as this may actually boost your energy level making it more difficult to fall asleep.

Go light on liquids before bedtime. Limit the amount of liquids consumed within 90 minutes of bedtime if urination is causing you to wake up during the night. For adequate hydration, try to consume liquids liberally during the daylight and early evening hours.

Sharon Palmer is a registered dietician who has managed healthcare food and nutrition departments for 16 years. She is a member of our Board of Experts in the Ask an Expert section of our website and can be reached at spalmer952@earthlink.net.

Timely Tip:

If you are caring for someone with hand tremors, you can help them avoid a nasty burn from spilling hot liquid drinks by having them use a weighted drinking cup. The weighted cup will help slow the tremors while drinking and help keep the cup upright when putting it down. If a weighted cup isn't handy, try using straws in regular cups or spouted cups and glasses. All of these are effective in guarding against spills.

Transition Tips

Getting Loved Ones to Willingly Move to Assisted Living

By Jacqueline Marcell

Convincing elderly loved ones to move from the comfort of the home they've known for many years into an assisted living situation can be one of the toughest hurdles for families to accomplish. The best way is to start the conversation earlier than later, while your loved ones are still in good health. Getting them used to the idea beforehand will make it easier when the time comes.

But what if you haven't already made plans for the transition? If it is time for your loved ones to alter their living situation, here are some things you should consider.

Think Safety First

Keep in mind that your loved ones' safety is the most important thing. If you know that they cannot remain in their home safely, don't let your emotions override what you know needs to be done. Don't wait for a broken hip, a car accident or a crisis call before you step in. Recognize that when you were a child, your parents would have done everything possible to keep you safe. Now, as hard as it is, you have to be the "parent," and you have to make the best decisions for their safety.

Consider a Multi-Level Facility

Be sure to consider the benefits of a multi-level facility that allows for additional services as your loved ones' health declines. This prevents the turmoil of having to move them to a new location as more services are needed. Many seniors start out with their own private apartment and then progress through assisted living and eventually to skilled nursing and dementia care, all within the same facility. They may be able to bathe and take their own medications now, but as they need help, it is a blessing to know that services can be added. Many times the friends they have made along the way progress right along with them, which provides the comfort of familiar faces.

Get References

The best way to check out a facility is to talk to numerous families who already have a loved one living there. Drop in on the weekend when families are visiting and ask if they are happy with the accommodations, food, service, activities, cleanliness, reliability, personnel, etc. If they had it to do again, would they move their loved one there? What have they learned from the experience? What do they wish they had known when they were beginning the process? Also, ask the administrators if there are any liens or lawsuits filed against the facility. If they will not give you a written statement that there are no legal problems, keep looking!

Ask About Activities

Adult children are often filled with guilt for moving their parents out of their own home — that is, until they see them flourishing in a new environment and participating in activities they haven't enjoyed for years. Speak with the activity director to make sure there are numerous activity options. Does the facility offer field trips, games, crafts, singing, dancing, gardening, cooking, bingo, exercising, movies, etc.? Be sure to monitor the director and make sure that the activities are happening.

Create a Need

Once you have chosen the right place, ask the administrators for help in convincing your loved ones to move. Staff members are very familiar with this problem and deal with it daily. Ask a social worker to call your parents and develop a relationship over the phone. They also may be able to drop by while you are there to talk with your parents and invite them for a get-together. Later, take your parents out to lunch, then casually drive by the facility "to say hello to that social worker, who was so kind to drop by" to visit them. Seeing a familiar face is usually very helpful.

Keep in mind that your loved ones' safety is the most important thing. If you know that they cannot remain in their home safely, don't let your emotions override what you know needs to be done.

Timely Tip

If getting out of bed – literally -- is a struggle for your loved one, consider installing a sturdy transpole next to the bed. This floor-to-ceiling pole is installed securely and lets your elderly care recipient maintain their dignity by continuing to get out of bed independently – with just a little help from the pole. They grab the pole to steady and assist themselves both getting out of and into bed.

Dealing With Aging Parents Who Push Your Buttons

Continued from Page 2

You will need to come to some sort of understanding about why your parents push your buttons, and what they are getting out of it.

In The News

If your mind is sharp, but you or your loved one is becoming more forgetful, the cause could be a mild cognitive impairment – a type of memory loss where the ability to remember recent information falls off.

The Mayo Clinic, in its newsletter, says this disorder could be a “strong early predictor” of Alzheimer’s disease. In fact, the Mayo Clinic says research indicates that 80% of those with mild cognitive impairment will develop Alzheimer’s within 10 years.

The troubling signs include forgetting appointments or recent conversations, and having trouble remembering important dates.

While there is no specific treatment for mild cognitive impairment, you should see your doctor and discuss these symptoms. He may want to track your progress on a regular basis.

Usually, there is a predictable “set-up” that culminates in a final statement or question that sends you over the edge, so it’s important to isolate the pattern that PRECEDES your parents’ provocation.

Step 2 is involuntary, by definition. All you have to do at this point is allow yourself to fully experience the physical changes that are automatically triggered when your parents push your buttons. Check your breathing in the seconds after your parents push those buttons. Is it short or labored? Is your heart racing? Do your fists automatically clench? Is there pounding in your head? These are some of the common reactions to having your buttons pushed, and they are different for everyone. As you become more conscious of them, you will note the order in which they appear. This is important because it gives you both a warning and time to differentiate between physical signs and emotions.

Step 3 is the most important in this pattern. The key is to become so familiar and comfortable with those signs that they no longer push your buttons. Yes, your palms seem on fire and an anvil appears to have been dropped on your skull, but those signs are no more “real” than the whoop-whoop-whoop of an ambulance siren. That siren is not an actual measure of crisis, it is a warning signal to avert crisis. Its deafening shriek has a valuable purpose.

Acknowledging your physical signs involves stripping them of their emotional weight. The “light bulb” moment is when you realize you are going to be all right, that the warning bells are just that — a sign that gives you plenty of time to protect yourself. Remember what it was like in school when a fire alarm went off for a drill? Remember how the sound of the siren immediately shocked you and started your heart beating faster? Then, seconds later, you process the experience and realized it was probably a drill. So you calmed your physical reactions down and prepared to exit the building.

You will eventually be able to slip rather gracefully into Step 4 (Analyze What Your

Parent Wants and Why). Now you are breathing and a bit more relaxed, and you will be able to understand, embrace, and accept the things you deeply know about yourself and your parents — in other words, the origins of these behaviors. It’s likely that the same themes will recur again and again, and if you listen carefully you will begin to see how your parent’s deep needs express themselves, however vaguely.

You will need to come to some sort of understanding about why your parents push your buttons, and what they are getting out of it. For the most part, it’s not enough just to write them off as evil or self-involved or just plain mean. You and your parents are complex people with an intricate history. It is tempting to simplify their motives, but this will not get you very far.

The key word in Step 5 (Decide What the Productive Response Is) is productive. Productive does not mean “punitive” or “manipulative.” It means reaping results, benefits, or profits.

So, in going to Step 6 (Display that Response) it is vital that you share your feelings and explain what you miss or value and what happens to hurt you. Once you are willing to throw off your defenses and share with your parents, they are far more likely to work in the same manner with you.

Once you can see the act of button-pushing as a human activity made by someone you love, you will be able to follow their lead, rather than feel abused. If you follow the lead with love and understanding, you are on your way to neutral territory where healing can occur (Step 7).

Dr. Dale Atkins is a psychologist and media commentator who appears frequently on TV. She is the author of 5 books, including the just-published “I’m OK, You’re My Parents – How to Overcome Guilt, Let Go of Anger, and Create a Relationship That Works” (Henry Holt and Company). She lives in Westport, Connecticut, and can be reached at dale@drdaleatkins.com.

When Caregiving Interferes with Your Personal Relationship

Continued from Page 1

intimacy," warns Mitchell.

In addition to spending less time together, spouses of caregivers may find themselves taking on more duties around the house. "The non-caregiving spouse may have to take on additional roles in the family, or (even) caregiving roles with the care recipient," Schempp explains. "If the caregiver has to reduce work hours or quit, there can also be a financial consequence."

When dinner needs making, the children need tending and the house needs cleaning, non-caregiving spouses often will have to step up to the plate before their caregiving spouses. The result may be an unfair and unbalanced workload, and the overly worked partner may experience physical burnout and emotional resentment towards the often-absent spouse.

To prevent serious damage to the relationship, communication and working together as a team are essential.

"It's important to be mindful of each other's needs," Mitchell says. "Anticipate the other person's needs and reach out." Talking through difficult situations is extremely important, as is listening to each other. "The couple needs to talk about how caregiving will affect their lives, what kinds of compromises they can work out, and what they need to do to make sure that they have time together and stay current with each other," advises Schempp.

It is quite essential to take time out as a couple and enjoy each other's company. "Couples have to create time for each other," states Mitchell. "They must have some time off, when they don't feel guilty about being alone as a couple." If that means leaving the loved one with some trusted help, then experts recommend just that. "One caregiving couple made an agreement to go out to dinner and/or a movie every Saturday night while caregiving, just to make sure they nurtured and checked in with each other," Schempp notes. "Some couples arrange at least a yearly vacation and/or several weekends away during the year, just to make sure the marriage has not gotten lost on the 'to do' list."

While caregivers have the difficult task of balancing caring for an aging loved one and

caring for others in their personal lives, non-caregiving spouses should also look out for their caregiving spouses, experts say. Although it may take a lot of effort and energy to deal with a spouse's absence, it is crucial that non-caregiving spouses understand and recognize the stresses caregivers face on a daily basis. "The caregiver needs a lot of support," Schempp recounts, "someone to listen to his or her problems, someone to be nurturing ... and take up the slack around the house."

Emotionally, non-caregiving spouses can be there by reassuring the caregiver that he or she is doing well — sometimes, a pat on the back goes a long way when someone is caring for a loved one. "Remind the caregiver that he or she needs to take care of himself or herself, and needs breaks," Schempp advises partners of caregivers. Mitchell agrees, "The person who's not the primary caregiver to the loved one needs to be tuned in to the needs of the caregiving spouse."

With plenty of understanding, open lines of communication, and taking time out for each other, caregiving couples will better be able to keep their relationship healthy. "Don't put the marriage on the back burner," advises Mitchell, "doing so will essentially put the marriage on hold."

According to Schempp, couples must prioritize and make sure their responsibilities are in order. "Obviously, the marriage needs to take the back seat at times of crisis. At those times, everything is put aside to handle the crisis," says Schempp. "However, once one is dealing with a chronic illness or a new level of care which is stable, the caregiver needs to look seriously at (their) priorities and figure out where the important things in life fit."

After all, ruining a marriage or serious relationship is a high price to pay — even for an aging parent in need — and one most caregivers are not prepared to face, nor should they!

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Couples must prioritize and make sure their responsibilities are in order. "Obviously, the marriage needs to take the back seat at times of crisis."

In The News

Does your doctor wear a necktie? This may seem like an odd question, but researchers have found that neckties worn by doctors are terrific breeding grounds for bacteria.

According to a study presented in May at the American Society for Microbiology conference, neckties worn by doctors were eight times more likely to carry bacteria, and therefore spread infections, than ties worn by hospital workers not in patient contact.

Why? Researchers found the neckties often came in contact with patients and their bedding. Doctors would even wash their hands and then adjust their tie, contaminating their hands again, they said.

One solution posed by the study: doctors can switch to bow ties — or no ties.

Getting Loved Ones to Willingly Move to Assisted Living

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In The News

If senior-friendly supermarkets are popping up in Europe, can we be far behind?

According to a British website, <http://just-food.com>, the Austrian chain Adeg has opened four "Aktiv Markt 50 Plus" supermarkets in Austria with designs intended to cater to an aging society.

Among the features: reading glasses available at the door, shelf labels in large print, in-store rest areas and magnifying glasses at the meat and deli counters.

Once you have chosen the right place, ask the administrators for help in convincing your loved ones to move. Staff members are very familiar with this problem and deal with it daily. Ask a social worker to call your parents and develop a relationship over the phone.

Remember, any kind of change can be very scary for an elder. Take things slowly, calmly and steadily, making their safety and well-being your goal.

Another idea is to have the social worker ask your parents to "help" with the other seniors at the facility or with something they need help "fixing." Could they, for example, go over to help with bingo or singing classes? Perhaps they can help with lunch for the elders there. Tell your loved ones they are "needed" to help and entertain others. Giving them a "job" can ease the transition of a move.

Reach for Support

Realize that everyone who has ever been lucky enough to have their parents reach old age has experienced the pain of watching their

once-competent parents decline. We all know it is a part of life, but even with all that has been written, there are no words that can prepare us for the sorrow. Reach out for help from family and friends, and look into a support group. Don't even think you can do it alone!

Jacqueline Marcell is a former television executive who, after caring for her aging parents, became an author, publisher, radio host, national speaker and advocate for eldercare awareness and reform. She authored "Elder Rage, or Take My Father ... Please! How to Survive Caring For Aging Parents (Impressive Press), a Book-of-the-Month Club selection. She can be reached at j.marcell@cox.net.

The Caregiver's Home Companion

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Upcoming in June

- Summer vacation travel while caregiving – hitting the road with Mom and Pop for a much-needed vacation. But is it really a vacation? Can it be?

- Looking into the face of our own future: How caregiving for our aging parents shapes our own plans for and views of old age.

- Your parents are adamant about staying in their own home for as long as they can. But with summer-time upon us, how can you make their outside environment safe and give your caregiving self more peace of mind?

- A dog may be man's best friend, but what do experts say are the best pet companions for the elderly?