



The Caregiver Link

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Quotes

As we express our gratitude, we must never forget that the highest appreciation is not to utter words, but to live by them.

-John F. Kennedy

“Sometimes we need to remind ourselves that thankfulness is indeed a virtue.”

-William Bennett

“Gratitude is the inward feeling of kindness received. Thankfulness is the natural impulse to express that feeling. Thanksgiving is the following of that impulse.”

-Henry VanDyke

Men and Caregiving: Can The Two Go Together?

When Ug hooked up with Ooma in a cave sometime after the Ice Age, things were pretty clear. Ug was bigger and stronger than Ooma and he carried a sturdy club, so it made sense that he should go out and bonk some animals to bring home their supper. Ooma, on the other hand, had the marvelous ability to produce little Ugs and Oomas, feeding and nurturing them so they could grow up and help their parents with these important tasks. As long as Ooma didn't get sick ~ Ug would pretty much be forced to stick her out on an ice floe and find another Ooma ~ everything went along quite well.

We've come a long way, baby! Or, have we? We still teach our little Tom, Dick and Harrys to bring home the food and protect the home front. We give them tool kits and soldiers to play with to prepare them for the world they will confront when they grow up.

We seldom give our sons dolls or dishes to practice being caring and nurturing, yet the expectations we place on 21st century men are far different than they were thousands of years ago. One telling sign of this is that roughly a third of family caregivers are now male. Is it any wonder that many of these men feel uncomfortable, even unqualified for this role?

Let's look at some typical male characteristics that appear to be barriers to the caregiving role and see if they have unexpected silver linings.

Many men are “fixers”.

It is frustrating for many men to care for loved ones whose illnesses are chronic or terminal. Raised as problem solvers, it goes against their grain to accept

conditions that cannot be improved. Larry, for example, railed against the doctors who told him that his wife's lung cancer was “terminal”. He demanded they never use that word again when referring to her. His denial held firm throughout her illness and, as her condition worsened, he pushed caregiving duties off onto his daughters and spent the majority of time away from his home. Both he and his wife were then deprived of the love and tenderness those final months could have afforded them. What a sad result for all concerned!



In reality, “fixers” have much to offer the caregiving situation. Illness brings with it many tasks such as dealing with insurance companies, scheduling appointments and navigating financial and legal issues. Fixers ~ as opposed to many female caregivers ~ find these tasks second nature.

Problem solving can also lead to greater comfort or a richer life experience for the care receiver. Dan, for example, was able to fashion an easily movable ramp over the old fashioned track of glass sliders to the deck. This allowed his wife the freedom to wheel herself out to her precious plants and bird feeders whenever she wished. Bill, quite hard of hearing, was able to rig up a light button to call him from his workshop when his wife needed him.

Male ingenuity can be a huge blessing in a caregiving situation. The trick is to recognize ~ and accept ~ what can be fixed and what cannot.

Many men hold in their feelings.

Caregiving is a role that is riddled with

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Urinary Tract Infections and Alzheimer's Disease

For people with cognitive deficits, urinary tract infections (UTIs) can present particular difficulties. [Later stage Alzheimer's disease](#) is associated with increased difficulties in communication. Therefore, someone with a UTI, might be experiencing pain and discomfort yet be unable to articulate this. However, sudden changes in behavior, such as [aggression](#), anxiety, violence, may be an indication that something is physically wrong. People with Alzheimer's get sick too, but far too often their change in behavior is attributed to dementia rather than from a physical cause.

Urinary tract infections are more common in older people, people who are bedridden or who require total nursing care, those who are catheterized, or who use continence aids and in people whose immune system is compromised.

Symptoms of UTI include the following:

- Urine looks cloudy or milky. It may look a reddish color in serious cases of urine infection if [blood](#) is present.
- Urine often smells offensive.
- People with a UTI often feel they need to go to the bathroom frequently. Often they only pass a small amount of urine.
- Nausea, even vomiting.
- Fever.
- Painful, burning sensations in the area of the bladder or urethra, when they pass urine. The person may cry out or show distress when urinating.
- Back pain. The person may clutch or rub their back
- Fatigue. The person may be less willing to carry out tasks or be more reluctant to eat or to exercise.

Some, or all of these signs and symptoms, may indicate a urine infection. Consult a doctor who will do a physical examination, take a urine sample and other tests, in order to exclude other diseases.

Treatment of Urinary Tract Infections

Antibiotics may be prescribed. The type of antibiotic prescribed will depend on the person's medical history, the cause of the UTI, the bacteria causing it, and the person's previous response to any previous or similar infections. Pain relief may be required. It may help with disturbed behavior and sleeplessness. If someone has frequent recurrent urinary tract infections his/her doctor may prescribe a low dose course of antibiotics for periods of 6 months or more.

Caregiver Tips on Urinary Tract Infections

Caregivers can help by encouraging the person in their care to drink plenty of fluids. Increased urinary incontinence may be a problem so be vigilant and keep the person clean, dry and comfortable. If you use absorbent underwear, frequent changes will discourage further infection and discomfort. When carrying out personal hygiene routines for women, wipe from front to back to prevent bacteria around the anus from entering the vagina or urethra. Avoid using feminine hygiene sprays. Encourage showers rather than baths if possible. Maintain previous toilet routines & trips to the bathroom, otherwise incontinence may become a permanent feature.

By Christine Kennard
/www.healthcentral.com



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Emotion: anger at a loved one's illness, guilt over not being able to "fix" it, fear and worry over what lies ahead, grief and sadness over what has been lost. All caregivers experience these feelings. But women are "allowed" by our society to cry, vent, and express their feelings. And this is healthy. Pent up emotions can easily lead to depression and caregiver burnout. Everyone loses.

Men are hesitant to let their feelings show but, once they do, they are often better at letting go of the hard feelings and moving on. Fortunately, emotions can be expressed in many ways. Studies show that writing down our feelings in a journal is a healthy alternative to expressing them verbally. Pouring out our feelings ~ especially the hard ones ~ on the computer or in a journal has been shown to improve our health both physically and emotionally. Thus, no one need ever know of John's resentment of his adult children's non-participation in caregiving or Pete's struggle with anger at God.

Keeping a journal can also illuminate which problems may actually have a potential solution. John, after rereading some of his entries, realized he had never asked his children for help, figuring "they should just know". Accepting that his son and daughter could not read his mind, he screwed up his courage and called a family meeting to ask for help. Which brings us to the next issue?

Many men don't like to ask for help.

Just as Ug would never ask for help in bringing down that antelope, modern men are raised to "tough it out" in any difficult situation. Unfortunately, caregiver situations are much more complex; so complex, in fact, that no one person can handle every facet. Asking for assistance is not asking for charity. It is managing a difficult situation by appropriately plugging in available resources in the most efficient way possible. And many men are masters at this.

There are two main sources for caregiver assistance. The first is your personal support system which includes family, friends, neighbors and church contacts. Don't forget to consider the friends of your loved one who may not be as familiar to you. Many of these people want to be willing helpers if they only know what to do. The embarrassment of asking for help can be minimized by talking to one close friend and asking him/her to start a phone tree to spread the word concerning what is needed. An announcement in the church bulletin could bring help

You never anticipated.

The second source of help is health and social organizations. Ask your doctor if your loved one is eligible for nursing or health aide services. Likewise, your health insurance could have benefits of which you are unaware. Investigate resources for respite care or adult day care centers in the community. Find out from the Department of Human Services under what circumstances Medicaid or other government services might kick in. Naturally, Senior Resources has a wealth of information and services.

If you work outside the home, please don't neglect to make your employer aware of your situation. It is much better to let your boss know you were late because your loved one kept you up all night than to let him/her think you are an indifferent employee. In addition, the human resources department may know of additional resources that can make your life easier. Some family-like work places take great pride in "taking care of our own" and have a social network set up that will provide enormous support.

The reality is that caregiving is a tough road for all. Men have strengths and liabilities in dealing with it just as women do. For all, help comes in the form of concentrating on your personal strengths and finding appropriate help and support for the rest. And for all, caregiving can be the most meaningful and fulfilling endeavor of your life. Bless you for being willing to do it!

By Andrea Heeres

Happy
Thanksgiving



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An Area Agency on Aging**

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Understanding Alzheimer's Disease & Other Dementias

Week 2 – Wednesday, November 11, 7-9 PM
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Week 3 – Wednesday, November 18, 7-9 PM
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Readers Corner:

Men As Caregivers

By: Betty J. Kramer & Edward H., Jr. Thompson

Much has been written about the modern caregiver who, more often than not, is an older woman assuming the care of parent, spouse, or child. But in recent years the demographics of caregivers have changed. More men are taking up the roll of primary care provider for a loved one. Recent studies estimate that between 14 and 18 percent of men ranging in age from nineteen to later middle age are providing care to a family member or friend with a serious illness or disability. And in men seventy-five or older, there are more husbands caring for wives than vice versa. Much more needs to be learned about their experiences and the challenges they face.

