



CAREConnections

Information and Inspiration for Caregivers

A Publication of Boulder County Area Agency on Aging

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Dear Caregiver,

What better time than National Family Caregivers month to acknowledge the tremendous contribution, value, and needs of family and other informal caregivers. According to the Family Caregiver Alliance, informal caregivers supply 75% of the care provided for our friends, family, neighbors, and loved ones in the United States — making up the very backbone of our society. If you are caring for an older adult, you are giving of yourself in a way that is deeply meaningful *and* vital. And for many the work comes with profound rewards of connection that couldn't have been imagined prior to walking this path. For others, the relationships and connection are not so easy, yet they move forward — bravely meeting the challenges in front of them, for the benefit of someone in their lives.

There is one universal reality, regardless of what your particular situation looks like: if self-care is not a priority, the role of caregiver can bring a level of strain that goes beyond what you can reasonably bounce back from. But, despite the gifts given, caregivers often feel that their own care is the very last priority. It is not uncommon to feel guilty for even thinking of taking time for yourself. This is the opposite of how we should view things, as caregivers deserve and need to be cared for too. And the truth is — the person *you* care for, ultimately and undoubtedly, benefits from your well-being. For all these reasons, we are dedicating this issue to the subject of *guilt free* self-care. The articles that follow share some of the ways that we can, and should, care for ourselves. Our hope is that you take a moment to bow to your own needs... and drop any whiff of guilt that is keeping you from honoring them.

And *thank you* for all you do!

Juliette Kershner, Editor

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Self-Care using a Solution Focused Approach

By Monica Rotner

The year was 1987 and I was about to enter my senior year of college. My mother and I had been sharing the extraordinary opportunity and challenge of being the live-in primary caregivers for my father's 86 year-old mother, in her seventh year of dementia, while my father travelled out of the country for work. On some days my grandmother was as funny and creative as she had been when I was a younger child, when I was her favorite grand-daughter and I made up for the fact that she had only three sons. She taught me how to knit, sew, cook, write creatively, and shop for clothes! More often though she was angry, sullen, sad, and had somehow developed some very harsh judgements about others that seemed contrary to all my experiences of her. She was hateful to my mother, her daughter in law. This was one of the most meaningful and difficult experiences in my lifetime.

Now, as a middle-aged social worker who has embraced a model for working and living that is called "Solution Focused," I thank her for helping to form me into who I am. In a solution focused world, the future is both "created and negotiable," we assume good intentions, and are curious- for example: about why, even from good intentions, come ineffective ways of asking for what one wants? The mind has an amazing power to drive how we feel (physically and emotionally), with whatever we focus on becoming bigger and more present. Here are some solution focused tips and tricks that may help in many situations - including being a caregiver.

Surviving a stressful day; whatever you focus on gets bigger:

When I have that awful feeling of "I just can't do this another minute without screaming," I practice a little trick. I take a moment alone (locked in a bathroom, hiding in a closet...I mean whatever it takes,) and I close my eyes and ask these questions to myself with as much detail as I can...

Imagine it is the end of this day and I have survived it- not even with grace- but still I survived. I am sitting in my favorite spot, in



Dear Reader,

Once a year, we reach out to all of you on the other end of this labor of love that is the creation of Care Connections, about the opportunity to contribute toward the services we provide. We so value being able to provide information, guidance, resources... and hopefully inspiration for caregivers, and it is our deepest intention to bring forth articles that speak to you in a meaningful way.

A key piece of our funding comes through contributions. Because it is important to us that cost not interfere with your accessing information, *Care Connections* is always available regardless of ability to pay a subscription fee. At the same time, if you find it supportive and feel you can contribute towards our costs, this will be gratefully received. **To provide a guideline, we recommend a donation of \$25, but the amount that is right for you, is perfect.**

Sending out Care Connections is one of the many services we provided to caregivers through the Area Agency on Aging. We provide free caregiver training classes, the Respite and Companion Volunteer Program, respite resources, the annual Caregiving Symposium, Information and Referral Services, and much more. Your contribution helps us to continue to provide services, which those in the noble position of providing care to an older adult deserve.

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Sincerely,

Juliette Jonjak Kershner
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my favorite position, with my favorite sounds. Where am I sitting? What does the sitting place feel like? Soft or firm? feet up or on the floor? Is my head thrown back on a pillow relaxing or am I looking at something that brings me joy? What does the favorite spot smell like? Details... details! You would be surprised at how a few minutes of this will settle your body down as if you are already there *and* you have an attainable goal for the day. Get to that favorite spot even if you're a beautiful mess along the way.

Solution Focused listening:

For caregivers there can be such sadness in watching memory and personality changes in your loved one. "Grandma? What do you mean you don't know who I am?" Instead, play with the idea of listening for a future story that may appear. Perhaps you are someone even better to them today. Trying to convince them otherwise can be sad and frustrating to you- and terrifying to them. I may ask questions like "who do I remind you of?", "what did you like about them and now me?", "what would they say to you right now that would be helpful?" Or, if its more supportive to them (and so easier on both of you), ask questions without insisting that they know who you are. You can just allow them to talk to you as that person.

Stay Curious

Even memories that don't reflect "reality" may be important to know about and may provide you a calm way to connect as the caregiver. I often think of myself when I was younger (and ok, sometimes still) when I had recreated a reality about someone because I was angry, stuck, hurt. What helped was asking myself questions

"It does not do to dwell on dreams and forget to live"

-- JK Rowling

like: "I am so curious about this story-can you tell me what's important about it to you?" The past is stuck and static, the future can be whatever we want.

Do more of what works. If it doesn't work stop doing it:

If I have a poor interaction with a loved one I ask myself...was there a time where I managed a similar situation and it went (even a little bit) better? You could say to your loved one, "it looks like you really don't like this. Has there been a time when we did this, and it went (even a little bit) better?" This could be about food, how I took the keys to end driving, managing role reversal such as helping with incontinence, etc. The next part is harder.... if I managed something in a way that produced huge stress (even if it was just for me) then I try and stop myself from doing it that way again.

Now I am 52 years old and I am finding my way through the last years of my 86 year-old mother's and 89 year old father's lives. I remind myself to use these tools as my way to ensure that the relationship they and I leave this world with, is even better than the one we had throughout it. Sometimes this is not that hard, as I was a spicy and fierce teenager. Once again, this is one of the hardest and most important things I will do in my life. Cheers and give yourself a huge squeeze for who you are!

Monica A. Rotner, describes herself as an L.C.S.W., mother, daughter, and human with real feelings.



Guilt-Free Sleep

By Dr. Ilene Naomi Rusk



It's so natural to care deeply for someone else and forget about yourself. As a caregiver, it can be really difficult to honor yourself as a priority. We all know that focusing on someone else is sometimes easier than taking care of ourselves. Often, I notice that caregivers feel they have to choose between caring for themselves or caring for their partner. I always emphasize that it doesn't have to be a choice; it can be both.

Our patients at The Brain and Behavior Clinic often have a dementia and trouble with their memory or their emotions, or some type of chronic illness. I regularly see caregivers who feel guilty — and I remind them that they are not paying enough attention to themselves. In a recent session I began to pay close attention to a patient's wife in front of her husband and my focus on her delighted the patient so much. I could see the love in his eyes as he felt his caregiver receiving attention.

Sleep and exercise are difficult to prioritize, so I talk to all my patients and caregivers about their reserve tanks. These days, we each have a reserve tank in our car. That's the extra gas that gets us to the gas station if our regular tank of gas is empty. Well when you're a caregiver, your tank is often too low, and that reserve tank gets tapped into. That's ok as long as there's fuel in the reserve tank. I see sleep and exercise as those fuels which replenish the tank. In this article we will talk about the importance of sleep. Later in this issue, I share a piece addressing the importance of exercise.

Sleeping and dreaming are as essential to your health as maintaining good nutrition and exercise habits. Sleep, a far from passive state, induces repair functions throughout your body and promotes physical and mental health. There is even evidence that sleep can keep the brain healthy as we age, so prioritizing sleep is a good opportunity for you to focus on your own emotional health, brain health, and even spiritual health. Scientists have found an incredible association between the brain, sleep, and clearing toxins. Their research identified a nocturnal plumbing system coined the glymphatic system. This system clears some potentially harmful substances out of the brain - but only when your head is on the pillow.

Inadequate sleep is linked to many health problems including increased risk of developing heart disease, cognitive decline, obesity, diabetes, and even increasing our propensity to develop the common cold. It's important to get checked for sleep apnea because we know that when the brain doesn't get enough oxygen at night there's a greater risk that people will develop cognitive problems. Need more reasons to feel guilt-free about prioritizing sleep? Read on!

Calm Your Emotional Seas

Sleeping and dreaming are two of the foundations of our emotional wellbeing. Without adequate rest, you may find your reactions unpredictable, your thinking impaired, and your happiness running on empty. Stress resilience is strengthened with consistent good sleep.

As a caregiver, it's easy to put other people's needs in front of our own, and sleep is often the

first thing to go. When I see patients, I always see them with their care-partner, and I ask about how sleep is for both of them. We know that chronic disrupted sleep can increase your risk of depression and anxiety disorders. But before rising to that level, poor sleep can impair emotional control and cause mood disturbances. When you're caring for someone else, you're even more vulnerable. When sleep deprived, you may feel more stressed, react poorly to situations that you would typically take in stride, and struggle to cope with change. Simply put, your emotional resilience is affected, and you have less reserve.

New research is digging deeper into the neurological underpinnings of good sleep. There's a close relationship between sleep deprivation and emotional reactivity. You might feel like 'flying off the handle' more easily after a poor night's rest because it's easier for the reactive parts of our brain to get hijacked when we have less sleep. As a caregiver, you need more nourishment than ever, so give yourself the gift of sleep and allow it to fill up your emotional bank account.

Learn Better

Sleep is essential for learning and memory. Dreams might help us rehearse our day and process our emotions. When we're tired, our poor mood makes it more difficult to learn and remember things. Our behavior also takes a hit. In a sleep deficient state, our decision-making and problem-solving capacities are impaired. With impaired judgment, we may have difficulty acting in ways that truly align with our heart's purpose.

Tips for Successful Sleep

It's easy to dismiss good sleep habits when the pressures of caring for someone else keep us up late. But remember that the chronic impairment of willpower, emotional control, and higher cognitive abilities is likely to impact our caregiving and our interactions with our partners. It might even affect our overall decision-making. If you want to show up fully for yourself and those around you, invest in a good night's sleep.

I'm the first to acknowledge that poor sleep habits are hard to break. Try starting with small but steady changes:

- Aim for seven to nine hours of sleep per night. Sure, there are individual differences, but most studies find that the sleep requirement for most healthy adults falls into this range
- Try to maintain a regular sleep pattern, getting up and going to bed at around the same time each day. This helps to create an established circadian rhythm. You can use an app on your smartphone for this.
- Establish a relaxing pre-sleep routine which might include jotting down a to-do list which you can commit to taking care of in the morning. Getting your worries on paper helps you not fret about upcoming tasks during the night. Listen to calming sounds before bed. Make it a ritual. I like the free app called Relax Melodies.
- Prioritize your sleep rhythm and talk to your family member or loved one about it. If applicable to you, get help from a professional who understands disturbed sleep in dementia, because we see a lot



“To Thine own Self be True”
-- William Shakespeare

of sleep disruption with people who have neurological issues.

- Make a cozy sleep space. Try sleeping in a cool room, free of artificial light, especially those with blue light sources. That means leaving your cellphone and laptop outside the bedroom door.
- Speak to your doctor about getting a sleep study if there's a lot of snoring or disrupted sleep, to rule out sleep apnea. There are things to do to correct sleep apnea. We also offer cognitive behavioral interventions for insomnia (CBT-I) which are supported by a lot of science.

Sleep replenishes our body and soul, lets the thoughts of our day integrate, and there is even evidence that sleep is a time when neurotoxins might be cleared away from your brain. Good sleep is the secret sauce: it helps us stay open-hearted, have physical and emotional resilience, and be as loving to ourselves as we can be. Essentially, it helps replenish our tanks so we can show up as our best selves. If you need help with your sleep, see your doctor, ask for a sleep study, and certainly feel free to call our clinic to get support from one of our brain health specialists or psychotherapists who specialize in optimizing sleep for patients and caregivers.

Ilene Naomi Rusk, PhD, is a brain health consultant with the Healthy Brain Program, at the Brain and Behavior Clinic in Boulder, which can be reached at 303-938-9244.

VISIT WITH A CAREGIVER

Linda and Jim joined forces 20 years ago bringing with them, respectively, three and one practically grown children. Linda agreed to speak with Care Connections as she anticipates the emotional and practical challenges of helping her husband deal with his increasing memory loss. (The names used here are pseudonyms.)

Care Connections: I understand that your husband has been aware of memory problems for some time, and I suspect that you have noticed a shift in your relationship. Can you talk about your experience and how you picture your future as a couple? This issue of Care Connections is focused on “caregiving without guilt.” In our discussion, we will touch upon guilt as an often-present emotion for caregivers and how it has operated in your life.

Linda: Sure. Jim and I have been together 20 good years. It became apparent two to three years ago that Jim's memory loss was becoming a problem, and we realized it was time to share this with our children. We started, strategically, with my daughter and her husband because we thought they would be the easiest to talk to about this.

CC: How did you start this conversation?

Linda: We told them that Jim was experiencing profound memory loss and described its various categories: nouns, names, what to buy at the store, and so on. We talked about Jim's fears for the future. He focuses on the scariest, worst possibilities: not recognizing friends and family, incontinence, getting lost. He also said that he feels he is aging faster than he should be. I am

disturbed by this train of thought, his uncharacteristic anxiety, and his increasing dependence on me.

CC: How does the dependence show itself?

Linda: I have a lot of activities and lots of friends. Jim has also been a man who worked hard, enjoyed many activities, and had friends of his own. He still enjoys his book group and several discussion groups. Yet, recently, he has been saying, "Can't you stay home with me? Why do you always need to be going out and about?"

CC: This sounds like a pretty serious change. It also sounds like a set up for guilt.

Linda: Could be, but the last time he complained when I had to leave home in the evening for my volunteer job, I said, "If you don't mind waiting until 8:15 for dinner, we can meet at (a favorite restaurant) and have an evening together."

CC: How did it go?

Linda: Beautifully. He agreed. We met. We sat outside, had dinner, and looked at the moon. It was lovely. It was romantic. It felt normal.

CC: Sounds like a reasonable solution for that particular moment. You addressed his fear of being alone with a practical alternative, a plan of action. You could leave and he had something to look forward to. The story hints of problems to come. You dealt with a potential guilt -inducing situation by understanding his emotions (fear of abandonment; loneliness) and devising an alternate way for him to view the evening. Even more significantly, it highlights a shift in the balance of your marriage from partner to caregiver.

Is that how it feels to you?

Linda: Yes. And that's been happening gradually for some time.

CC: Have you always been able to reason your way through difficult times?

Linda: No, of course not. I've learned many lessons. An early one occurred when I was in my 20s. I was going through a stressful time and consulted a psychiatrist who started me on psychotropic meds. After a while, I decided this wasn't what I wanted and learned Transcendental Meditation and to practice Yoga. These helped me more than the meds ever did.

CC: Are you still practicing these non-chemical methods of de-stressing?

Linda: Yes, and they are effective. Another lesson came some time later. Stress is one thing but I hadn't yet learned to take care of myself. To do this, I had to examine my situation realistically and confront the problems in my first marriage. I wasn't thriving and knew that I must leave the marriage, which I did. I had learned that taking care of myself and my three children required finding a healthier environment.

CC: That's a big one. Any more lessons?

Linda: Yes, this was a real-life example as I watched my parents deal with the end of their lives. My mother developed Parkinson's Disease and my father took excellent care of her. He had to do it right and it was impossible for him to ask for help. He said, "This is what a man does." So, after five years of doing almost everything for her, he became exhausted and

[\(continued on page 9\)](#)



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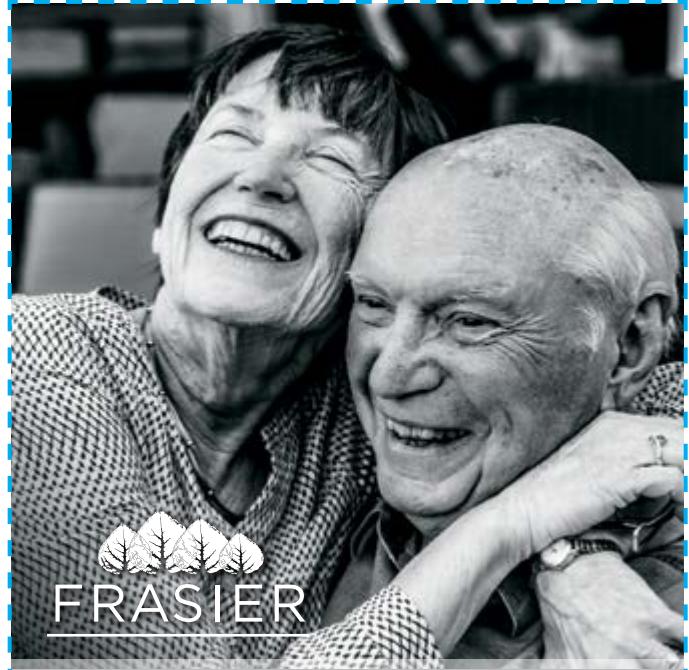
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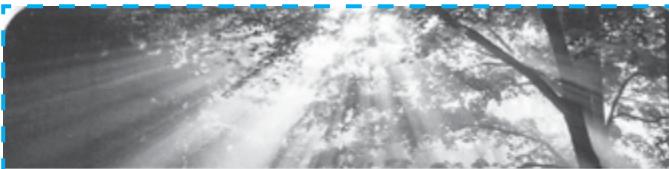
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probably depressed. He eventually chose not to treat a heart problem and died much before he needed to. He was stubborn and didn't take care of himself. My mother, on the other hand, lived another two years. She was completely rational and organized her life so she was able to buy a house, live near me, hire the help she needed, and die in her own home. I learned from my father's example to take care of myself. I saw Mom every day, but I didn't bring her into my household. Teaching full time and caring for three children as a single parent did not leave room in my life to be a full-time caregiver for my mother.

CC: It seems the most recent and maybe most powerful life lessons were from your parents.

Linda: Possibly. As to the theme of this issue, my parents did teach me the importance of certain duties and obligations and the value of meeting these responsibly. But there was no guilt associated with these values. Unfortunately for my father, his sense of duty, in my opinion, went too far, and he paid for it with his life. I suspect I'll try to take care of myself without guilt, as I embark upon my own caregiving duties. I see my own and Jim's challenges as his mind continues to change. How do I respect his need for independence as he becomes less competent?

CC: That's not an easy process to navigate. Knowing something about you and your life, I guess that you will meet the challenges to come with respectful competence and ask for help if you need it. Without guilt.

Linda: I hope so. I might add, that trying to practice "mindful" attention to my needs and my husband's needs might just get us through whatever comes to us as a couple with some grace.

Lynn Malkinson is on the Editorial Advisory Committee for Care Connections.

LSD: Laugh, Sing, and Dance Everyday

By Barbra Cohn

Laugh

Charlie Chaplin once said that "A day without laughter is a day wasted." During the decade I took care of my husband, I shed more tears than in all my previous years combined. I also had some good laughs. We laughed together, especially when we were dog sitting for our grand-dog. Sometimes I laughed uncontrollably when he came out with nonsensical comments, and I think that sometimes laughter was just a way of releasing pent up stress and anxiety.

Understanding the facts about what laughter does for the mind, body, and soul is the first step to making it a priority as a caregiver. According to Heather Hans, a Boulder licensed clinical social worker, psychotherapist, and certified clinical anxiety treatment professional, laughter helps release natural Killer (NK) cells which increase immunity and help us to resist disease and illness. A 2005 University of Maryland study found that laughter increases blood flow by dilating the inner lining of blood vessels. This process is similar to what happens when we exercise. Laughter also reduces the stress hormone cortisol, and helps the body release endorphins, our "feel-good" chemicals. Laughter adds more joy to life, eases anger and fear, improves mood, and enhances resilience.

So how can you laugh when you're stressed out and tired from caregiving? Watch a funny animal or baby youtube video. You can even find

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COMMUNITY RESOURCES

This column provides information about events, classes, services, and other resources of interest to family caregivers in Boulder County. Please remember that it is each person's right and responsibility to research a service provider before taking action. See "Information and Assistance in Boulder County" on the back page for ways to learn more about these and other resources. (To share information about a resource for family caregivers, please email InfoCaregiver@bouldercounty.org or call 303-678-6116. The deadline for the January-February 2020 issue is November 15.)

Boulder County Area Agency on Aging offers **National Caregiver Training Program**, an 18-hour course, taught by a registered nurse, that helps family caregivers acquire the skills needed to provide safe, confident care for frail older loved ones, on Mondays, November 4 – December 9, 5:30 – 8:30 p.m., in Niwot; and **Powerful Tools for Caregivers**, a 15-hour course that gives family caregivers the tools to help them take care of themselves, reduce their stress, communicate effectively, and thrive, rather than just survive, while caring for an older loved one, on Tuesdays November 5 – December 10, 1:30 – 4 p.m., in Boulder. The courses are open to Boulder County residents who provide any level of care for a relative, partner, or friend who is 60 or over, or of any age if the person has dementia. (The courses are not open to professional caregivers.) There is no charge, but donations are appreciated. Financial assistance for respite care (substitute elder care during class periods) is available. Pre-registration is required, at 303-678-6116 or InfoCaregiver@bouldercounty.org.

The Alzheimer's Association, Boulder County Area Agency on Aging, and Longmont Senior Services is offering **Living Well with Dementia**, an afternoon of programs providing hope and information for people living with dementia and their family care partners, with time between sessions for snacks, connecting, and checking out local resources, Thursday, November 21. Register for one, two, or all three programs: **The 10 Warning Signs of Alzheimer's Disease**, 1 – 2 p.m., about the difference between normal age-related memory loss and dementia; **Dementia Conversations: Q&A**, 2:20 – 3:40 p.m., highlighting some of the more challenging conversations surrounding Alzheimer's disease and related dementias, with break-out session for caregivers and people living with a diagnosis; and **Transcending Dementia**, 4 – 5 p.m., with a positive perspective on the value of looking more deeply at the person beyond the disease. There is no charge, but pre-registration is required at 303-651-8411.

The Alzheimer's Association, Boulder Seniors Foundation, and Boulder County Area Agency on Aging offer **SPARK Ballroom Dance and Holiday Social**, with music, ballroom dancing, and refreshments, on Thursday, December 12, 1 – 2:30 p.m., at the East Boulder Senior Center. The SPARK programs are designed for individuals with neurogenerative disease, including dementia, Alzheimer's, and Parkinson's, who are accompanied by their caregiver or partner. Family members and friends welcome. For more information call 303-441-4150 and refer to program code 19060.

Medicare Open Enrollment Period, the time to review and make changes to Medicare Part D (prescription drug) or Medicare Advantage/Health Plans, is October 15 – December 7.



Appointments accepted by reservation with a Boulder County Medicare Counselor for an individual review of your plan at clinics held in local communities *and* open enrollment support is available by phone as well. Locations with clinic dates on or beyond November 1 are East Boulder Senior Center, 5660 Sioux Drive, Boulder, November 8, 9 a.m. – 12 p.m. (call 303-441-4388 to register); Lafayette Senior Center, 103 S. Iowa Avenue, Lafayette, November 1 and 22, 9 a.m. – 12 p.m. (call 303-661-1492 to register); Louisville Senior Center, 900 Via Appia, November 7, 14, and 21, 1 – 4 p.m. (call 303-335-4919 to register); For enrollment support by phone during times, or in locations, not listed, call 303-441-1546 by December 1. Note: This annual open enrollment period is not for enrolling in Parts A and B or Medigap plans. For more information, call 303-441-1546.

The Longmont Senior Center offers **Road Trip to TRU PACE, a program of All-inclusive Care for the Elderly** based in Lafayette, Friday, November 8, 8:15 - 11:30 a.m.; **Living with Alzheimer's: Late State Caregivers**, presented by the Alzheimer's Association, Tuesdays, November 19 and 26, 3 – 5 p.m.; **Self-Care for the Caregiver**, presented by Jim Macris, LCSW, Thursday, December 5, 1-2:30; **Coping with the Holidays When you are Grieving**, presented by Patti O-Rourke, Grief Counseling Intern and Charley Rosicky, LCSW, of TRU Community Care; Thursday, December 5, 3 – 4:30 p.m.; **Legal and Financial Planning for Alzheimer's Disease**, presented by the Alzheimer's Association, Tuesday, December 10, 2 – 5 p.m.; and **Healthy Relationship Dynamics**, presented by Melissa Arredondo from Safe Shelter of St. Vrain Valley, Thursday, December 12, 10 - 11:30 a.m. All programs are free, but pre-registration is required, at 910 Longs Peak Ave,

Longmont, call 303-651-8411.

St. Andrew Presbyterian Church offers a presentation on **Caring for a Loved one with Memory Loss**, dementia, or Alzheimer's, presented by Megan Carnarius, RN and dementia care expert, Sunday, November 10, 12 – 2 p.m., at 3700 Baseline Road. This presentation will address the challenges of caregiving and making complex decisions, whether locally or from a distance. There is no cost for this program. Please call 303-494-8094 or email office@StAndrewBoulder.org with questions.

Alzheimer's Association of Colorado offers **10 Warning Signs of Dementia**, Thursday, November 21, 1 – 2 p.m. at the Longmont Senior Center, 910 Longs Peak Ave, Room A; **Lo Basico: La Perdida De Memoria, La Demencia, Y La Enfermedad de Alzheimer**, Miercoles, 13 de Noviembre, 1 – 2 p.m., Longmont Senior Center, 910 Longs Peak Ave, Sala: A; **Healthy Living for your Brain and Body**, Thursday, November 14, 10 – 11:30 a.m., West Senior Center, 909 Arapahoe Ave, Boulder; **Understanding and Responding to Dementia-Related Behavior/Special Focus: Helpful Hints for the Holidays**, Monday, November 18, 6 – 7:30 p.m., TRU PACE, 2593 Park Lane, Lafayette and Tuesday November 19, 3:30-5 p.m., AltaVita Memory Care Centre, 800 S. Fordham St, Longmont; and **Effective Communication Strategies**, Thursday, November 14, 3 – 4:30 p.m., Erie Community Center, 450 Powers St. Pre-registration required at alz.org/co or 800-272-3900.

For a complete list of caregiver support groups that meet in Boulder County, call 303-678-6116 or email InfoCaregiver@bouldercounty.org.

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online laughter clubs. Laughter is contagious and it's almost impossible to watch one of these without joining in the fun. Watch a comedy, call an old friend and reminisce about the crazy stuff you did as kids, or play with a young child.

Rather than turning to food, alcohol, or other types of self-destructive behavior to relieve stress, the experience of humor and laughter provide a sound and healthy alternative for decreasing stress and feeling happy. Incorporating humor into caregiving can help lighten the load and help caregivers to stay positive.

Sing

Whether you sing in the shower or in a chorus, it's been well documented that singing reduces stress levels and depression. Group singing boosts oxytocin levels and creates a feeling of "togetherness." (Oxytocin is called the "love hormone" because it is released when mothers breastfeed and when people snuggle up or bond socially.)

Singing in the shower or in the car, when you're on your way to work or to care for a loved one, works your lungs, oxygenates your blood, and reduces cortisol, the stress hormone. Singing also increases the production of endorphins, and immune factors that help us stay healthy through cold and flu season. A 2004 German study examined saliva samples of choir members before and after two rehearsals that were one week apart. The researchers found higher levels of immunoglobulin A, which fights infections, after the rehearsals.

Other benefits of singing include improved breathing and back pain alleviation, since in order to sing, you need to stand up straight.

Researchers at the University of Gothenburg in Sweden found that the heart rate of singers, especially those who sing in a choir, varies according to the music they are singing and the breath work involved. This study suggested that choral singing helps to regulate the limbic system which is responsible for emotions and that communication with a group performing the same task strengthens the feeling of cooperation.

Nina Friedman, a member of the Boulder Generations Community Choir, said "After a long span of dealing with medical issues, singing in a choir, for the first time in my adult life, has definitely increased my sense of joy and well-being. Once I learn my melodic part, I feel able to let go, and freely express my love of song! Hearing how it beautifully blends in with the harmonious whole of the choir, makes me feel so alive and a part of a passionate musical community!"

So sing your heart out and try to include your care partner. It's amazing that people who even have advanced dementia can often-times remember the words to songs they sang decades ago.

Dance

I always say that dance is what kept me off antidepressant medication during the years I cared for my husband who suffered from younger-onset Alzheimer's. I did folkdance, salsa, and contra on a weekly basis. And it was well worth the expense of hiring someone to keep my husband company on those evenings.

Dance supports the release of endorphins from the brain into the bloodstream. I experienced firsthand a rush of happiness for hours, and sometimes days, after dancing for just a couple of hours. Not only does dancing uplift



your spirit, it can help you think more clearly. A 21-year-long Einstein Aging Study, that was published in the New England Journal of Medicine in 2003, found that dancing is the best form of exercise to help prevent dementia when compared to 11 other activities including swimming, bicycling, and team sports. The study also found that dancing can help slow down cognitive decline.

Dancing to music that carries special significance can be a wonderful way to interact with your care partner. Why not put on your favorite music and dance in your living room, either alone or with your care partner? The Avalon Ballroom, at 6185 Arapahoe Avenue in Boulder, offers dance classes and events every day of the week. Or rent a dance instruction DVD and boogie! Most likely, no one will be watching.

Barbra Cohn is a member on the editorial board of Care Connections. She is the author of Calmer Waters: The Caregiver's Journey Through Alzheimer's and Dementia. Visit her blog at <http://barbracohn.com>.



Short Inspiration on Guilt-Free Exercise for Caregivers

By Dr. Ilene Naomi Rusk

Most of you know all too well the enormous amount of dedication that accompanies the role of caring for someone you love. There are many compelling reasons for you to take care of yourself and exercise regularly if you're caring for someone else, but mostly, moving your body can be fun! At the Brain & Behavior Clinic we

always spend time tailoring the right kind of exercise routine to each of our patients and caregivers during their Brain Health Check-up.

Adequate exercise can help your stress levels, quality of sleep, immune function, mental health, and overall energy and cognitive alertness. Moving your body is definitely key if you care about your brain health and mental health. It doesn't have to be time consuming - there are easy ways to integrate exercise into the long, dedicated days of being a caregiver. A brisk walk around the neighborhood in the morning is a great, quick way to start your day. When you have a day off or a little bit more free time, add strength training to your exercise regimen; slow movements and low weights is what science supports. Also, a good dose of movement which puts your body into a state of calm, like Tai Chi or yoga, is both nurturing and supportive to your health. And don't forget to dance (wherever and whenever you are inspired!) The most important thing is to just keep moving. As a caregiver you deserve time to focus on yourself, to release your stress and recharge, and to pay attention to the health of your body, your mind, and your soul.

It's important to check with your healthcare provider, physical therapist, or trainer to find exercises which are safe for you and tailored to your particular needs. Ask about Silver Sneakers or go to your local recreation center or Y. Boulder County is full of great resources.

Ilene Naomi Rusk, PhD, is a brain health consultant with the Healthy Brain Program, at the Brain and Behavior Clinic in Boulder.

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INFORMATION AND ASSISTANCE IN BOULDER COUNTY

Within Boulder County, there are several ways to access information and assistance about resources and services for older adults and their family caregivers:

- Check out **Network of Care for Seniors and People with Disabilities**, a comprehensive online service directory, at www.BoulderCountyHelp.org.
- Call the **ADRC Help Line**, at 303-441-1617, and Boulder County Area Agency on Aging staff will respond to your message.
- Call the **resource specialist** in your community (numbers below). Services vary by community but include identifying needs, exploring options, finding solutions, and providing in-depth assistance.

Allenspark area 303-747-2592

City of Boulder 303-441-4388/303-413-7494 (bilingüe)

City of Lafayette 303-661-1499

City of Longmont 303-774-4372/303-651-8716 (bilingüe)

City of Louisville 303-335-4919

Erie 303-926-2795

Lyons area 303-823-9016

Nederland area 303-258-3068

Niwot area 303-441-1617

Superior 303-441-1617

