

**Caring
Hearts
Ministry**



Nuggets of Hope A Newsletter for Caregivers

Karen Boerger, Caring Hearts Ministry, www.karenboerger.com
Email address: joy4caringhearts@gmail.com

May, 2015



SHARE YOUR HEART

Caring at Work

By **LeAnn Thieman** (taken from www.caregivers.com, Issue #785)

Are you one of the 65 million Americans who care for a family member? One of the 20-50% of employees who tend to a loved one before going to work, then return to care again after a long hard day on the job? Feeling torn between both “jobs” and trying to perform well at each, causes so much stress that working caregivers are often plagued with more mistakes, conflicts, and stress-related illnesses. These simple tips will help ease that stress:

Talk to Your Employer Honestly: Tell your supervisor about your caregiving demands at home. Make an appointment to discuss this at a time when you are better rested and feeling your strongest so you can state the situation in a professional, emotionally-controlled manner. Don't offer excuses, but instead reasons for changes he or she may note in your attendance, work schedule, or attitude. Explain why you may need to decline additional hours, a promotion, or transfer. Reassure him or her that you are committed to the company and its peak performance and will remain accountable to your duties.

Ask For What You Need: Once you've reinforced the above commitment, your employers will be more receptive to ideas to make the workplace and schedule more manageable for you. Come prepared with suggestions that will help-- for example, coming to work early, staying late, working from home, or taking longer lunch hours to check on your loved one, make personal phone calls, (or take a nap!) Brainstorm with him or her about other workable options. Often employers allow flexibility in the use of comp time, sick days and vacations. In many organizations fellow employees are allowed to donate accrued time off to help a caregiver during a crisis period.

Take Care of Yourself: Caregivers have higher than normal incidents of illness--those taking care of someone with a chronic illness have a 63% chance of dying early; another 63% say depression is their most common emotion. Caregivers often become so depleted they cannot maintain the stamina to continue caring for another. Therefore, you must take time daily to

nurture yourself physically, mentally and spiritually.

Physically: Eat well-balanced meals on a regular schedule. Take a daily multivitamin. Exercise regularly, even if it's simply taking a walk. As difficult as it may be, strive for a minimum of seven to eight hours of sleep a night and nap when possible. Get regular medical checkups and treatments of aches and pains before they turn into something more serious.

Mentally: Pay attention to your own feelings and emotions and seek counseling if needed. While it's impossible to always leave the stress and heartache in the parking lot, try to keep emotions in check at work. Vent feelings to trusted family members or friends, not coworkers. Schedule time for yourself. Use relaxation or stress management techniques, such as meditation, visualization, biofeedback and yoga. Stay actively involved with friends and hobbies. Create a support network and/or join a support group.

Spiritually: Take time, even as little as 15 minutes per day, for prayer or meditation. Read or subscribe to inspirational magazines or books to uplift your spirits. Seek the counsel of a minister or religious leader you trust and respect.

Seek Support: Ask for help. Friends, family, and church groups are often eager to assist and are only waiting to be asked and directed. Find respite care so you can regularly take time out for yourself. There are countless community, state and national resources to support you not only at work, but at home. Most cities have programs to offer assistance to the caregiver. The National Family Caregiver's Association, www.nfcares.org, is an excellent start in accessing this information. Another great resource is your local Area Agency on Aging. With the passage of the National Family Caregiver Support Program in 2000, all AAAs have a mandate to address the needs of family caregivers. Finally, if needed, you may be able to utilize The Family Medical Leave Act (FMLA), a national policy that guarantees covered employees 12 weeks of unpaid leave each year to care for a newborn baby, a newly adopted child, a seriously ill family member, or to recover from their own serious health condition while ensuring their job security. Each state has different regulations. To learn about yours, call your state legislator.

Following these tips will help you better tend to your job, your loved one, and yes, yourself.

LeAnn Thieman is coauthor of *Chicken Soup for the Caregiver's Soul* and a nationally acclaimed professional speaker, author, and nurse.



The Value of Massage for Caregivers by Kristine Dwyer, staff writer for caregiver.com

*Why did I wait so long before having a massage? I retired from my job and was given a gift certificate for a massage. I waited until the last week before the certificate expired before making my appointment. Why did I wait so long! **It was awesome!** I am a firm believer that massages help relieve stress as well as muscle pulls, etc. - Karen*

Massage therapy isn't just a luxury anymore and has actually become a vital part of health care practices worldwide. It is a holistic therapy that has shown positive effects on physical and mental health in addition to enhancing medical treatments. Having a massage does more than just relax the body and mind. There are measurable physiological and psychological changes that occur; especially when massage is used as a preventative and continuous therapy. The effects of massage on the body's systems can be profound, directly impacting our immune system, digestion, respiration, circulation, nervous system, muscle health and more. It has been said that, "Massage is to the human body what a tune-up is for a car."

Experts estimate that 80-90 percent of disease is directly related to stress, therefore, massage is one way to combat the effects of stress and promote relaxation. In addition, massage can lower blood pressure, increase circulation, improve recovery from injury, help fight fatigue, promote more restful sleep and increase concentration. Pain relief can also be achieved by the stroking of the affected muscles to increase blood flow throughout the body. This in turn brings oxygen and nutrients to the muscles and helps eliminate acids and accumulated waste products. Other benefits include relief of mental stress, peace of mind, reduction of anxiety, and an increased capacity for calm thinking and creativity. The satisfaction of our need for caring and nurturing touch directly leads to a feeling of well-being.

Current research shows that more people are getting massages and as they become more mainstream, they are now appealing to all age groups. Recent national surveys have found that many physicians are encouraging patients to pursue massage as a treatment. In addition, the number of hospitals that offer massage therapy as a patient service has increased by more than one third over the past two years. Some employers have also found that offering massage therapy during break times actually increased staff alertness, motivation and productivity and reduced sick leave days.

Massage is suggested on nearly every caregiver self-help list, yet it seems that only a small percentage actually takes advantage of its benefits. Modesty, unfamiliarity or lack of information about the massage experience may prevent caregivers from participating in a valuable form of self-care and positive, healing touch. The following paragraphs provide caregivers with the information they will need to make an informed decision about massage.

Benefits and Results:

As a society, we are touch-deprived and this can lead to physical and emotional challenges. From birth to the end of life, caring touch is necessary to bring about a sense of well-being and security. Massage offers a drug-free, non-invasive approach that focuses on the body's natural ability to heal and regenerate itself.

Massage has also been used as a primary intervention for caregivers that experience stress, fatigue and insomnia. A study by the Oregon Hospice Association and College of Healing Arts found that when massage was offered as a respite intervention, 85 percent of the caregivers reported a decrease in emotional and physical stress, physical pain was relieved for 77 percent

of the caregivers and difficult sleep was eased for over half of the participants. It is hoped that in the future, massage therapists can join hospice and medical treatment teams to assist caregivers and patients with sore muscles as well as offer them restfulness, compassion and peace of mind.

Massage Recommendations:

It is advisable for all persons interested in massage to consult first with their doctors to confirm that massage will be beneficial to them. There may be some conditions where massage is not recommended or specific techniques need to be limited. This may be especially true for some cancer patients or those who have varicose veins, skin inflammations, infections or tumors.

Locating a massage therapist can be done by word of mouth, through a physician or clinic or by contacting the American Massage Therapy Association. They represent therapists around the country and require members to follow specific practices and a strict code of ethics. Massage therapy services should be provided by a professional who has received proper training in a variety of techniques, has graduated from an accredited or approved program and is certified, licensed or regulated by the state. Ultimately, having a sense of trust and comfort with the therapist will reflect on the outcome of the massage experience.

Basics of Massage:

Once the choice to have a massage has been made, it is important to discuss general health questions, concerns and massage methods with the therapist. This will help alleviate apprehension and maximize the massage experience. A massage session will take place in a warm, comfortable and quiet room on a special massage table. Soft, relaxing music is played and the aroma of healing oils or scents may be present.

Most massage techniques are performed with the client unclothed; however, each person may decide what clothing to wear for their own comfort. The therapist will leave the room to allow the client privacy while disrobing. Clients then cover themselves with a sheet or towel and are properly draped at all times to maintain warmth and privacy. Only the area of the body being worked on will be exposed. It is important to discuss with the therapist which parts of the body need to be massaged such as back, arms, legs, feet, hands, head, neck and shoulders. Private areas will not be touched. A scented oil or lotion may be used to hydrate the skin and allow for smooth strokes.

Massage techniques include: basic rubbing strokes to stimulate blood vessels, rocking movements and the application of pressure to specific muscle points for tension release. The average full-body massage lasts about an hour while a half-hour session allows time for a focus on specific areas such as the back, neck and shoulders or legs and feet.

Most people close their eyes, listen to the music and become completely relaxed throughout the session. The therapist may gently move the body and talk briefly about the massage

techniques that are being used. Clients should immediately communicate any discomfort they may be experiencing so that another approach can be taken. Massage is the most beneficial when the body is not resistive to touch and the client feels at ease with the experience.

Once the massage is completed, many people feel a sense of freedom and calmness. After an initial period of feeling slowed down, people often have an increase in energy, focus and productivity, which can last for many days. The frequency of receiving massage therapy varies from weekly to monthly depending on the perceived benefits, physical and emotional results and cost factors.

Cost of Massage:

Massage therapy ranges from \$40-\$100 per hour depending on the type of massage and the expertise of the therapist. Half-hour sessions are also offered at most massage clinics. In recent years, some insurance companies have added massage therapy to the list of covered medical procedures, especially if prescribed by a physician following a car accident or job-related injury. The best recommendation is to check with your insurance company for coverage prior to making an appointment. Choosing to invest in massage may be the best dollars caregivers spend to increase their capacity to provide care in the future. Family members can also support the caregiver by offering a gift of massage appointments.

Benefits for Caregivers:

Caregivers know the importance of caring for others yet sometimes they forget how important it is to care for themselves. A caregiver can become so focused on their role that they are unaware of what is happening to their own body and how stress is affecting them. Massage can be a wonderful way for caregivers to deal with the demands associated with caring for a loved one and it is especially important for replenishing the energy that is expended on helping others.

Studies have shown that when stress is not relieved, it can manifest itself into illness and disease. Setting aside time for massage on a regular basis can improve a caregiver's overall health status, increase energy, improve attitude and decrease stress. Many caregivers that have experienced a soothing massage have reported that they actually felt the tension melt away and felt reconnected to their own sense of self. Receiving a nurturing massage can remind caregivers what it means to be cared for and it upholds the value of what they give to others. Allowing themselves to be "cared for" now and then is valuable and necessary to their own survival. Opening up to positive touch and support reflects their own joy of giving and reminds them why they are steadfast in their role as a caregiver.

Massage restores a sense of wholeness for caregivers that may not have been felt for some time. It is a perfect potion for good health and it enhances a positive "mind-body-spirit" connection. By producing a meditative state, massage can provide emotional and spiritual balance and it allows for true relaxation and peace.



Recipe Corner

Depending on what part of the country you're from, strawberries may be in season. The following recipe is a favorite of our family dating back two generations.

Strawberry Shortcake

1 egg in cup; fill with milk
1 cup sugar
1/3 cup melted butter
1 tsp vanilla
1 tsp baking powder
1 2/3 cup flour

Mix together as for cake and bake in a prepared 8" x 8" cake pan.
Bake 350 degrees for 35 min. or until a toothpick comes out clear.



Meditation Corner

Lord, You know that sometimes circumstances beyond our control make it impossible for some of us to leave our homes. Help us to reach out to others, and they to us, in understanding and acceptance. Soothe the frustration that I sometimes feel in my caregiving challenges, and remind me of all that You have given me through Your innocent suffering and death, especially on rough days.