



July 2011

Keeping a Balance While Being a Family Caregiver

It is so easy to be swept into the tornado of family care responsibilities that you hardly see what is missing in your life until you crash and burn. The crash can come in the form of an illness, weight loss or gain, disturbances with sleep or energy or you may hear yourself snap at someone and you wonder, "Is that me speaking in that tone?"

Having a mom who has changed in her ability to oversee and care for herself actually has pulled me into trying to make her life better, happier and, of course, safe. This pull is both from her (saying "oh, can't I take you lunch today?") and from my wanting her to be happy (and me saying "how, nice – thank you") however, it might mean I will have to give up an exercise class I enjoy.

Nothing I do will change the fact that she has losses in her ability to self direct all aspects of her life or even to plan events like taking me out to lunch ahead of the "moment". My mother is actually happy in her assisted living environment; it is me who grieves the old mom and her former independent lifestyle. Thus, when she wants to do something fun – I feel compelled to say "yes".

Do you find yourself giving up what you love to do? Time with the grandchildren or your college aged son home for the summer? Or, long walks with friends or time at your gym? Did you give up a trip that would take you out of the country because you thought – "what will happen to mom should she have a crisis while I'm gone?" Do you talk with Dad on the phone every night



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and not give your partner or spouse time?

Love is knowing how to set limits. Love is doing what you need, not necessarily all that you want. The challenge is how to say "no" and how to make time for your own renewal. "Smart Phones" can't be smart without recharging, nor can people. Airline attendants tell you to put the oxygen mask on yourself before you put it on a child or dependent adult should the cabin lose pressure. Both of these are great metaphors for the need to find the balance between being a caring family member and being a healthy person.

There are 40 million of us caring for an aging family member: spouse, parent, aunt, uncle, grandparent, or surrogate family member. Whatever our relationship has been, it is now changing. In order for us to survive and see that our family member is cared for out of love and not frustration, we need to find ways to share the care. We need to make time for those things that keep us healthy and give us meaning and purpose.

This might mean you take your mom, dad or spouse to a Day Care program two days a week or hire a caregiver to stay with them on the weekends so you can go to the gym

or have lunch with your best friend. It might mean you take that trip to England and hire a Care Manager to be on-call for you should a crisis arise while you are gone.

I have developed a worksheet for family caregivers called the "The Happy Balance Zone" in which you list and prioritize activities that bring you joy and meaning. If you would like a copy of this, send us an e-mail and we will gladly support your quality of life with a copy. We also have a list of "Affirmations" for family caregivers – such as: (1) my love is limitless; my time and resources are limited and (2) I forgive myself for not always being patient. These are affirmations you use, one at a time, maybe saying them daily for a week or two before moving on to another one. For a copy of our 15 affirmations for self-care, contact us!

If you struggle with self care, join a support group or find a therapist to help you stay healthy while giving care to another!

One item I added to my life as I became a family caregiver is one indulgent treat per month. This could be a massage, facial or day trip with a friend. What will you add to your routine to help keep your life in balance?

Eldercare Services provides Counseling, Support Groups, Home Care, and Care Management to aid Family Caregivers. If you or someone you know could benefit from self-care, give us a call at (866) 760-1808 or email us at Info@EldercareAnswers.com.

Eldercare Services works with Seniors and their families in Walnut Creek, Alameda County, San Francisco and the Tri-Valley, CA. Visit us on the web at <http://www.EldercareAnswers.com> for more information.

Community Classes

Walnut Creek

What You Need to Know About Dementia But Were Afraid to Ask

3rd Friday of every month from 10 AM to Noon

1808 Tice Valley Blvd., Walnut Creek, CA 94595

Class Registration: Please call at least 3 days ahead

For more information regarding classes and support groups, visit us at www.EldercareAnswers.com or call (925) 937-2018, (415) 469-8300 or email us at info@EldercareAnswers.com

Support Groups

When concerns for aging family members are part of every day life, or when they interfere with work, your health or other relationships, you need to join a support group.

Caring for An Aging Family Member

2nd Thursday of every month from 7 to 8:30 PM

1808 Tice Valley Blvd., Walnut Creek, CA 94595

1st Tuesday of every month from 6 to 7:30 PM

605 A Chenery St., San Francisco, CA 94131

Cost for Support Groups: None

Support Group Registration: Not required



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Advocacy, Care, and Education

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