

The Brain & the Caregiver: Families at Risk



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April Affirmation:

“My mind is refreshed by quiet moments of mindfulness every day.”

Could providing care to a family member put your brain at risk? You might say, “Risk of what?” New research is showing that stress and anxiety have a negative effect on the body, damaging chromosomes and possibly becoming a catalyst to many serious illnesses including dementia, heart disease and cancer. When you think you are the “only one” who can provide all the care or the love, pulling you into caring for another person 24/7, you can actually put yourself at risk. You might suffer an illness far greater than the person you care for, putting that person in jeopardy of losing you as his or her primary advocate.

Dr. Philippe Goldin, PhD, from the Neuroscience division of Stanford and UC Davis, has done extensive studies on this issue which has led him to the promotion of the “Science and Practice of Mindfulness.” The practice of meditation and related exercises has been known to those outside the scientific circles for centuries. It is heartwarming for me to see this move into valid scientific research. It gives credibility to practices that allow us to experience the stresses and anxiety of life, but to also protect ourselves and our chromosomes with a few minutes of easy exercise each day.

It sounds easy, but if you have ever tried to meditate, you might suffer from a wandering mind as I do. According to Dr. Goldin, wandering minds are also destructive to our chromosomes. So, this takes lots of practice and intention. The good news is that you can stay in your own home and you don’t necessarily need to join a gym or find a Guru. It can be, and should be, a daily practice for those who are providing care for another.

I found it both startling and exciting that you can heal damaged chromosomes – it is the endings of the chromosomes called telomeres that are destroyed by stress, anxiety and pain. The telomere is like the end of a shoe lace (the plastic coating) and as you practice mindfulness, the telomeres repair themselves.

Below is a list of a few exercises that will assist you with keeping a healthy brain and body. These exercises are even more important for those who have a family history of any of the illnesses mentioned. Focused attention is key. If 60 minutes is a challenge – start with 20 to 30 minutes a day and gradually work up to 60 minutes. Even starting with 10 minutes will do your body well!

- Focused Breathing
- Systematic Relaxation
- Loving Kindness Meditation
- Physical Movement – Yoga, Tai Chi, etc.

I won’t go into all of the details of each of the above. However, here is an example of “Loving Kindness Meditation” from Sylvia Boorstein’s **“Happiness is an Inside Job”**:

1. Start by directing the phrases (the metta) at yourself: “May I be happy!”
2. Next, direct the metta towards someone you feel thankful for or someone who has helped you.
3. Now visualize someone you feel neutral about—people you neither like nor dislike. This one can be harder than you’d think – for example, a clerk at a store.
4. Ironically, the next one can be easier: visualizing the people you don't like or who you are having a hard time with.
5. Finally, direct the metta towards everyone universally: "May all beings everywhere be happy."

If you are interested in learning more about how to repair your telomeres, I am teaching a class that will explore more “brain-remodeling” exercises and will give you additional scientific data to support your new habits (see box below). This will enable you to care for others and not damage your own fragile brain. Our bodies and DNA need to be well-taken care of so we can have the lives we envision. You can repair the telomeres that protect your chromosomes from the stresses of life.

Special Event for Aging Adults or Family Caregivers Dealing with the Challenges of Aging:

Brain Remodeling

You can change your brain and your health! With Linda Fodrini-Johnson

Weds., April 16 | 5:30 to 7 pm

Eldercare Services, WC

More info or to register:
Info@EldercareAnswers.com

Expertise
Matters!

Eldercare Services maintains the highest standards for excellence, professionalism and quality in every aspect of care we provide. We are among only a few Home Care agencies in Northern California to be accredited by the Joint Commission and to have earned its Gold Seal of Approval. In addition, our Professional Care Managers are bound by the Code of Ethics and Standards of practice set by the National Association of Professional Geriatric Care Managers.

Community Class

Walnut Creek New Diagnosis?

Do you have Alzheimer's, Multiple Sclerosis, Parkinson's?

Learn how to manage your progressive illness

Wednesday, May 21, 2014 | 5:30 to 7:30 pm
1808 Tice Valley Blvd., Walnut Creek

**\$10 per person/\$15 per couple
or 2nd family member**

*Proceeds benefit the Alzheimer's Association, Parkinson's Institute and
National Multiple Sclerosis Society*

Class Registration Required

For more information, visit www.EldercareAnswers.com, call
925.937.2018 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 6 to 7:30 pm
1808 Tice Valley Blvd., **Walnut Creek**

1st Thursday of each month from 5:30 to 7 pm
Calvary Presbyterian Church, 2515 Fillmore St.,
San Francisco

No Cost and No Registration Required

More Info: 925.937.2018 or 415.469.8300



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**Providing Bay Area families with Care Management, Home Care Services, Advocacy,
Counseling, Support Groups and Education since 1989.**