National Health Observances

August
- Happiness Happens Month
- American Indian Heritage Month
- What Will Your Legacy Be Month
- Get Ready for Kindergarten Month

Week of August 1 - 7
- Simplify Your Life Week
- Single Working Women’s Week

Week of August 8 - 14
- Exercise with Your Children Week

Week of August 22 - 26
- National Safe at Home Week

Week of August 25 - 31
- Be Kind to Humankind Week

September
- Childhood Cancer Awareness Month
- Baby Safety Month
- College Savings Month
- National Alcohol & Drug Addiction

Caring for Aging Parents

As more Americans live longer, millions of middle-aged adults find themselves caring for their aging parents. It’s not an easy task, especially for those with children still living at home.

“Caregiving can be so overwhelming, it’s almost impossible,” says Donna Cohen, Ph.D., professor and chairperson of the department of aging and mental health at the Florida Mental Health Institute in Tampa, and coauthor of Caring for Your Aging Parents. “But it can be done if you develop specific skills and tailor them according to your parents’ needs and your family’s circumstances.”

The following is a framework designed to help you provide care more effectively.

Don’t Parent Your Parents

As your parents age and become frail or ill, resist the urge to regard them as children. Instead, think of caregiving as a family business and yourself as an executive with problems to solve.

“Treat your parents as having a legitimate role. This empowers a partnership,” Dr. Cohen says. “Your role will be to take control, but it’s not with the same authority you use with your children.”

For example: Your mother can’t see well anymore but insists on driving. Instead of taking away her car keys, sit down with her and begin a dialogue. Say, “Mom, I’m worried about you. Aren’t you worried about your driving?”

Don’t do it Alone

Every family is different, there’s no one right way of caring for aging parents. “But there are wrong ways, and the worst one is to do it alone,” Dr. Cohen says. The demands of caregiving can become so immense that they can affect your health, leading to illness and depression.

“Half of all caregivers get depressed in the course of caregiving,” Dr. Cohen says. “In turn, depression takes a toll on their physical health, affecting their job performance and can even lead to the abuse of the parents they’re caring for.”

What is EAP?
The Employee Assistance Program (EAP) is a FREE and CONFIDENTIAL service that can assist you and your eligible family members with ANY personal concern, large or small.
“Besides determining what’s workable for your parents, your goal should be to find the best way for everyone to work together,” Dr. Cohen says.

**Stay Optimistic**

Unlike caring for children, caring for aging parents, particularly ill ones, involves the reality that their deaths are approaching.

Nonetheless, “let yourself be guided by a tempered optimism,” Dr. Cohen says. “Don’t let your hope for the future die too fast.”

Within limits, there are things you can do now to maximize comfort and improve your parents’ quality of life. “You can convey support and show affection by giving your mother a new chenille throw because you know she’ll enjoy its softness and warmth,” she says. “Even holding someone’s hand is a powerful way to ease pain and loneliness.”

All told, “caring is more than loving,” she says. “It’s a series of discreet skills that involve listening to your parents, making decisions about their needs and taking action, if necessary. And it has mutual benefits. Through caring, we can learn more about ourselves.”

Wellness Library Health Ink and Vitality Communications © 2011