

Finding the Support that's Right for You

SUPPORT GROUPS

A caregiver support group can be defined as a gathering of caregivers, family, friends, and other interested parties who meets to discuss the many issues related to providing quality care for a loved one who is experiencing a disease or condition. It provides education and support for the caregiver. Research has shown the importance of social support for those caregivers that experience the physical and emotional stress of being a caregiver.

A caregiver support group can provide the following:

- A safe, supportive, confidential environment for sharing feelings and coping skills in a nonjudgmental atmosphere
- An opportunity to talk and share with other caregivers who are going through or have gone through the same experience
- A place to learn coping skills, saving you much trial and error
- Assurance that you are not alone
- Encouragement to maintain personal emotional, physical and spiritual health
- Tender loving care from people who truly understand your situation because they are “all in the same boat”



INDIVIDUAL SUPPORT

Support is offered on an individual basis by giving a family caregiver an opportunity to be heard, to communicate how giving care to a loved one affects them each day, and to obtain counsel and support if desired. An assessment is completed at first contact with the caregiver to determine if the caregiver is at risk for “caregiver burnout.” Suggestions and resources are offered.

Whether you are caring for your parents, a spouse, or another loved one, meeting and talking with other caregivers can be an opportunity to learn, connect, get ideas, and be understood.

When choosing a caregiver support group, you may want to visit more than one to make sure the group is the right fit. Most groups are facilitated by a social worker or other professional who specializes in caregiving. ❖



OFFERS 2 SUPPORT GROUP OPTIONS TO JOIN

In-Person Support Group

Tanglewood Wednesday Afternoons
PARK 1:00 - 2:30 p.m.
560 Seminole Rd., Muskegon

AND

Virtual Support Group

zoom Friday Afternoons
1:00 - 2:30 p.m.

All sessions are drop in – you can attend all of them or choose the topics that interest you.

For more information about Caregiver Support Groups call 231-733-3585 or 800-442-0054.



An Area Agency on Aging

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Mission

To provide a comprehensive and coordinated system of services designed to promote the independence and dignity of older persons and their families in Muskegon, Oceana, and Ottawa – a mission compelling us to target older persons in greatest need but to advocate for all.



Caregiver Support Staff



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Top Ten Things for Caregivers to Start Doing for the New Year

- 1 Keep records of all medications and reactions: make notes about what works, what doesn't and when you informed the physician of any problems.
- 2 Keep records of all doctor appointments: the reason for the visit, the doctor's responses to our concerns, any procedures performed, etc.
- 3 Start or continue to maintain copies of medical records for your loved one, and for yourself, as well. These will be beneficial should a grievance arise or if there are questions about medical histories.
- 4 Plan for the unexpected: discuss plans and wishes of everyone involved in the caregiving family. Talk about final resting places and what arrangements your family will want.
- 5 Have an Advance Directive filled out and given to the primary physician and all relatives who may need the form.
- 6 Have a Last Will and Testament completed or updated: without a signed will, the courts will decide how to distribute the possessions of your loved ones.
- 7 Keep a record of where all-important documents are kept. When an emergency or tragedy occurs, locating information should not be where we spend our thoughts and energies.
- 8 Record all monetary involvements: investments, resources creditors, debtors, business transactions, etc.
- 9 Have an insurance analysis done: is your home, life, and health insurance still appropriate for your family's needs? What about the insurance policies for your loved ones? Do you all have enough coverage to take care of any eventuality? Do you have provisions for Long Term Care? For respite care? Is your house adequately covered given the state of the weather patterns?
- 10 Clean out the medicine chest. Look for expiration dates on all medicine and check with your doctor about previous medications which will either be harmful with current prescriptions, or which are no longer effective for you or your loved one. Not only will you save space, but you might also save a life. ❖

TOP 5 MOST INTERESTING INSIGHTS ABOUT VALENTINE'S DAY

- 13%** of Americans would rather receive diamonds than chocolate on Valentine's Day.
- 10%** of Americans say they're single and loving it.
- 9%** of Americans buy candy or flowers for themselves on Valentine's Day.
- 8%** of Americans have proposed or been proposed to (or expect to) on Valentine's Day.
- 3%** of Americans say they're going on a Tinder date for Valentine's Day.

VALENTINE'S DAY TRADITIONS

All is fair in love and war, so the former is celebrated in countless ways. From a small handwritten note to telling someone they look good, the expression of love is endless. Red balloons, streamers, lights, and of course roses are everywhere, along with special deals and promotions in pretty much every store. Assorted chocolates, heart-shaped confectionaries, and chocolate-covered strawberries and cherries are popular on Valentine's Day, along with dinner for two offers in eateries. Children design cards in school to give to their teachers, parents, or first crush. Romantic movies are also shown all day on different channels.

VALENTINE'S DAY ACTIVITIES

1. Make your own card

Creating your own personalized card: it is not only a thoughtful sentiment, but also the way it was done in days of old. You can also add a heartfelt poem - whether you write this yourself, or borrow one from any of the iconic love writers such as Yeats, Browning or Shakespeare.

2. Plan a proposal to remember

Take your love to the next stage and surprise them with a proposal. Create an experience for lasting memories you will share together; there is no better day than on the day of love! Depending on what is special for the both of you - plan a private meal or holiday, spell out a personal message in rose petals and candles, or visit the place you first met. Get your family and friends involved to share in this special moment and help plan your loved one's dream proposal.



3. Create lasting memories

Extend your Valentine's Day gift beyond February 14 by making a photo album of your time together. This can be time later spent going down memory lane, on a rainy day indoors or anniversary. Include places you have explored together, nights out and significant milestones in your relationship. ❖



February's Website

seniorresources.trualta.com

Quotes

"To care for those who once care for us, is one of the highest honors."

Tia Walker

"Caregiving is a constant learning experience."

Vivian Frazier

Roses are red, violets are blue, your home is blessed because of YOU.

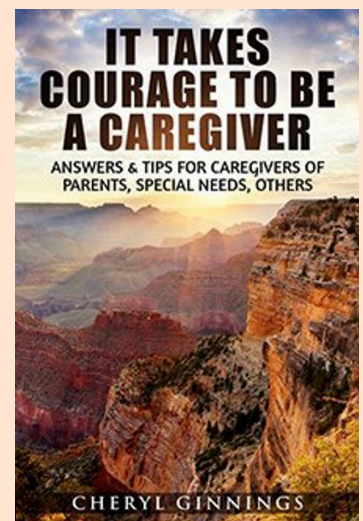
HAPPY VALENTINE'S DAY

This Month's Book

It Takes Courage To Be A Caregiver

by Cheryl Ginnings

"Be the voice for those who have no voice!" Cheryl is a caregiver from her early years watching as one grandparent, her parents, and her son had cerebral palsy.



Ways to Manage Musculoskeletal Pain at Home

by Janet Clements, RN

To be a caregiver for someone suffering from chronic musculoskeletal pain benefits from a certain mindset. One of selflessness, service, and empathy. It necessitates a broad knowledge of medical conditions and local resources, as well as an understanding of specific patient needs, preferences, and abilities. Being a caregiver is not a position one gets into for the money or the glory, especially when the patient is a loved one. The job is as tough as it is noble.

But an emergency can quickly expose ways in which we are not prepared. Shelter-in-place orders resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic clearly pointed out just how dependent caregivers tend to be on out-of-home resources. Rather than be handcuffed by a lack of access to outside people or facilities, we can look within for new ways to care in place.

Sometimes the best solutions arise when we're forced to challenge old ways of doing things. Here are seven ways caregivers can help patients manage pain, which are minimally reliant on others, during this pandemic or future emergencies. Some of these may surprise both you and your patient for their simplicity.

1. Stress management

If the mere thought of losing access to out-of-home care makes you nervous, you'll understand why stress management for you and your patient is first on this list. Study after study have shown that stress can have negative effects on pain. There are many simple ways to minimize stress at home including diaphragmatic breathing, meditation, progressive muscle relaxation. If those aren't your cup of tea, try Guided Imagery, a relaxation technique which focuses your senses to create a mental escape, or ASMR (Autonomous Sensory Meridian Response), an auditory approach to relaxation. You might each practice these individually, or together.

Not having to travel outside the home can also reduce stress on all parties, so consider that a small victory.

2. Socialization and support groups for chronic pain

Connecting with people—whether in person, over the fence, virtually or on the phone—can brighten spirits and help take one's mind off pain. With video conferencing applications like Zoom or FaceTime, there are more ways than ever to connect with friends, family, church groups,



or others with similar interests. Connecting with doctors and physical/occupational therapists by phone or video is also an option to get professional help without leaving the premises.

The patient's health care professional may also have suggestions on support groups or counseling. Keeping up interactions with others experiencing the same kind of challenges, related to pain and otherwise, can make people feel less alone.

3. Exercise

Nike is known for sponsoring world-class athletes, but its "just do it" attitude applies to everyone. This is its mission statement: To bring inspiration and innovation to every athlete* in the world. *If you have a body, you are an athlete.

In other words, all of us can get moving. A person doesn't need a gym membership or the latest athletic wear (apologies, Nike) or to leave home to be an athlete. The goal is not to set world records. It's to be active, improve blood flow and circulation, strengthen muscles, and improve the way one feels, physically and mentally. If it sounds like physical therapy, it pretty much is. There are plenty of activities a person can do in the home, including some simple exercises involving a can of soup and towel. Gentle yoga poses designed to increase balance and flexibility are also worth considering.

4. Cut back on alcohol

A study in Pain Medicine finds that "more than 25 million adults in the United States suffer from daily chronic pain, and approximately a quarter of these individuals use alcohol to manage their pain." While it's true that alcohol can alleviate some pain, it has also been associated with increased risk of liver disease, heart disease, depression, diabetes, and obesity.

Of the seven ways listed here to manage pain at home, none of them cause liver disease, addiction, heart disease, depression, diabetes, or obesity. Plus, cutting back on drinking will save a few bucks.

5. Interferential Therapy (INF) and Neuromuscular Stimulation (NMES)

Physical therapists often use INF in-clinic to relieve pain, and NMES to reduce muscle spasms, and improve blood flow. Some of these devices, categorically called TENS units (Transcutaneous Electrical Stimulation), are available for home use. To use them, patients place electrode pads on their skin and the device transmits electrical impulses

through the skin. High-frequency INF penetrates deep into muscle tissue, stimulating nerves to release endorphins and enkephalins, the body's natural pain relievers. But you won't find INF on all TENS units, such as those purchased over the counter. Be sure to look for one that has high-frequency INF. It can be used whenever the need arises, right at home. Treatment takes about 30 minutes, and many patients use the device while watching TV. It's a low-impact and non-addictive way to treat pain and stimulate muscles.

6. Track pain levels

Is the patient feeling better or worse than yesterday? How about a week ago? Or a month ago? Keeping track of how a person feels daily can be helpful. And if notes are also made about use of any pain management techniques, such as those described here, then over time you will gain understanding about which treatments are working and which are not. The simple act of writing down pain levels before and after a treatment can inform your plan and motivate action. The VA uses this straightforward tool, the Defense Veterans Pain Rating Scale, to measure pain, but there's no wrong way to keep track.

7. Get some fresh air, at least a little

Even with social distancing it's still possible to get outside. Changing perspective by leaving the home can help check off other items on this list. Go for a walk, talk to neighbors, breathe in the fresh air. Even getting out just for a drive and a change of scenery can be quite therapeutic.

Hopefully, these tips for managing musculoskeletal pain at home are helpful. There are countless other options to consider. Who knows? After the pandemic is behind us, perhaps at-home pain management will be a better supported part of our new normal. ❖



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St. Valentine's story

Let me introduce myself. My name is Valentine. I lived in _____ during the 3rd century. At that time, Rome was ruled by an emperor named _____. I didn't like the Emperor, and I wasn't the only one!

Claudius wanted to have a big army. He expected men to volunteer to join. Many men just did not want to fight in _____. They did not want to leave their wives and _____. This made Claudius furious. So what happened? Claudius decided not to allow any more marriages.

Did I mention that I was a _____? One of my favorite activities was to marry couples. Even after Emperor Claudius passed his law, I kept on performing marriage ceremonies... secretly, of course.

One night, we heard _____. It was scary! Thank goodness the couple I was marrying escaped in time. I was caught. I was thrown in _____ and told that my punishment was death.

I tried to stay cheerful. And do you know what? Wonderful things happened. Many young people came to the jail to visit me. They threw flowers and notes up to my _____. They wanted me to know that they, too, believed in love.

One of these young people was the _____ of the prison guard, Augustine. Her father allowed her to visit me in the cell. Sometimes we would sit and talk for hours. On the day, February 14, I was to die, I left Augustine a little note thanking her for her friendship. I signed it, "_____."

Fill in the story with the missing words:

wars, footsteps, Rome, window, families, Claudius, priest, daughter, jail, LOVE from your Valentine