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The Illuminator



AGING ANSWERS
Your Guide to Elder Care Answers



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Aging Answers' Services:

- **Assessment** — to identify needs & support system
- **Referrals** — to services that best meet the client's needs, budget, personality and our high standards
- **Coordination** — arranging, evaluating, and revising the services
- **Transition Assistance** — for moves to assisted living or skilled care
- **Monitoring** — 24/7 support

Meet the Founder!

Laurel Felsenfeld, company founder and president, is a certified rehabilitation RN and case manager in practice since 1990 with personal experience from family members affected by Alzheimer's and multiple sclerosis. **2009 Recipient of the Oakland University Nightingale Award for Excellence in Community Nursing**



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Photo by L. Felsenfeld 4/2010

Don't Get Fried By Caregiver Burnout PART 1

The dangers of chronic caregiving stress and knowing when to get help

A 2003 6-year study by Ohio State University of elderly caregiver spouses of Alzheimer patients proves that "stress kills".

The study found significant deterioration in caregivers' health and a 63% higher death rate when compared to a matched non-caregiving control group. About 70% of the caregivers died before the end of the study, most before the care recipient.

It appears the chronic stress of caregiving causes permanent changes in the immune system that lower the caregiver's resistance to illness and increases risk of depression.

Stress is a physical reaction to a perceived threat. The greater the threat appears, the greater the effects on the body. Perceiving a threat causes glands in our brains to send messages to our hormone and immune cells to step up production, and stimulates the nervous system—this increases the heart rate and breathing, shunts blood from the stomach and other organs to the brain, and releases of glucose to feed muscle and brain cells to "fight-or-flight" and activates the immune system to deal with injury. After the threat is removed the body returns to its normal state, but in chronic stress the body never has the chance to recover.

A related study found a chemical marker in the blood, Interleukin 6 (IL-6) rises under chronic stress and is linked to an impaired immune system.

Older caregivers had a four-fold increase in IL-6 compared to the matched non-caregiver control group and high levels continued for an average of three years after caregiving ended.

Caregivers reported depression at a rate nearly 8 times higher than non-caregivers.

The debilitating response to chronic stress is not unique to humans. A 2004 PBS Scientific American Frontiers Special entitled "Worried Sick" found that chronically stressed animals had high levels of IL-6.

These studies should be a wake up call to caregivers to take time away from caregiving to attend to their own health— physical and emotional.

It is suspected that caregivers die before care recipients due to neglect of their own health, such as missing annual physicals and screening tests that can find problems early when they are easier to treat.

In most cases, caregivers fail to recognize "burnout" until it's too late.

Caregiver Stress Test: Ask yourself if the following are rarely true, sometimes true, often true, or usually true?

- I find I can't get enough rest.
- I don't have enough time for myself.
- I don't have time to be with other family members beside the person care for.
- I feel guilty about my situation.
- I don't get out much anymore.
- I have conflict with the person I care for.
- I have conflicts with other family members.
- I cry everyday.
- I worry about having enough money to make ends meet.
- I don't feel I have enough knowledge or experience to give care as well as I'd like.
- My own health is not good.

If the response to one or more of these is usually true or often true it is time to get respite. Geriatric Care Managers are experts in helping caregivers find the most cost effective respite care arrangements. Our next issue lists resources and respite options. Please visit our website or call for a complimentary consultation if you need immediate help.

Chronic stress / age-related increases in the pro-inflammatory cytokine IL-6

Proc Natl Acad Sci U S A. 2003 July 22; 100(15): 9090-9095

"Caregiver Stress Screening Tool" Caregiver's Handbook Case Management Services of the San Diego County Mental Health Services, 1250 Moreno Blvd., San Diego, CA 92110

**Next Issue: CAREGIVER BURNOUT Part 2
Respite Options and Support Resources**