

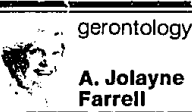
This caregiver is burning out

Dear Jo:
I care for my elderly mother (age 87) in my home. I am one of her four daughters.
I chose to take care of her for a variety of reasons, the major one being that I no longer work and therefore am free to look after her, whereas my sisters aren't. I also seem to be the one she gets along with the best.
My reason for writing is to ask you when I should appeal to my sisters for help. I sometimes feel I just can't go on, then after a good night's sleep I am able to manage.
I know that I just have to pick up the phone and call one of them, but I'd rather not as they seem to be even more overextended than I am.
Jo, would you take a few moments to think about my situation and give me some advice as to when I should call or even shout for help? I don't want to sacrifice my own health for my mother.
Miss J.E.

gerontology
A. Jolayne Farrell

faithfully.
When caring for another person, no matter what his or her age, there comes a point when the wise caregiver really should call for help. By taking sole responsibility for the care of your mother, you could be putting your health in jeopardy and are liable to suffer from caregiver burnout.
The following are signs and symptoms of caregiver burnout:
• Your caregiving responsibilities are interfering with your personal life to an unacceptable degree.
• You feel that no matter what you do it isn't enough.
• You are abusing yourself just to keep going, i.e., eating too much (or too little), drinking too much, or using drugs as a means of coping.
• Family relationships are breaking down because of the pressures associated with caring for your mother.

Dear Miss E:
I appreciate your reading my column, and I'm flattered that you do so



How to handle holiday stress



• You feel tired all the time and life isn't worth living.
MY ADVICE is to set up a schedule that enables you take two days off a week — one day for shopping and household chores, etc., and the other a day just for yourself. This should be spent "selfishly" by going out to lunch with a friend, having a facial, or seeing a movie.
With three sisters, you could alternate their help so that they don't feel pressed. Also inquire into the services for seniors in your community. Your mother could benefit from a day or two out at a day care center, or you and she may want to have a friendly visitor come for a few hours a couple of times a week.
Your concern for your mother is admirable. She is fortunate to have a daughter such as you. Be sure to take care of yourself as you care for her. Good luck.
Readers can write to Jolayne Farrell at 11 Cynthia Crescent, Richmond Hill, Ontario.

Q.I've decided this year not to let the holiday bustle and bustle get to me. Do you have any quick stress-reduction techniques I can use when things start to get tense?
A. Stress is everywhere, from last minute appointments to crowded malls, even on pleasurable occasions. The trick is to learn to master the stress and use it.
Under stress, the body mobilizes a "fight-or-flight" response similar to the response used by early humans when confronted with life-threatening situations. These responses include rapid pulse, rising blood pressure and tensed muscles.
In the past, it was thought that these were involuntary body responses that could not be controlled. Medical researchers have now found that these responses — heart rate, breathing, blood pressure and body temperature — can be controlled through relaxation methods. These methods result in less tension and less likelihood of developing stress-related illnesses, such as headaches, backaches or hypertension.

Relaxation techniques require both mind and body involvement. They require concentration and the ability to let go and surrender anxiety-producing thoughts and feelings.
There is no one best relaxation technique. Individual preferences will determine the best one for you.
DEEP BREATHING.
This technique can be done anywhere there is somewhere to sit. Sit down and make yourself comfortable. Keep your back straight, placing your hands on your thighs with thumbs touching. Do not cross your legs. Close your eyes. Try not to move during the exercise.
Now take a deep breath. As you inhale as much as possible, count "one" to yourself. Then, as you very slowly exhale, count "two" to yourself. Continue breathing and counting to 10. Ignore any thoughts that might pop in and concentrate on counting.
Breathing exercises can also include imagery or visualization exercises. While breathing, the person pictures a peaceful setting. Counting and/or mental imagery helps shift the mind from externally oriented,

logical thoughts to internal thoughts through the constant repetition of the image.
PROGRESSIVE RELAXATION.
This is a good technique for people who have trouble pinpointing what makes them tense and where the tension is stored in their body.
With progressive relaxation, the person tenses and relaxes a different part of the body at a time, starting with the toes and ending at the head. Pay particular attention to shoulder and neck muscles where tension tends to develop.
It's important to realize that total relaxation is hard to achieve. Patience — not the "I want it now" attitude — is more likely to bring results.
Start practicing these techniques for five to 10 minutes a day now. Then when the holidays go into full swing, you'll be able to control those stressful, tension-building times.
The Consumer Mailbag answers your questions. Address mail to The Consumer Mailbag, Concern Detroit, One Kennedy Square, 4th Floor, Detroit 48226.

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