

Podcast Transcript: You Might Be a Family Caregiver

Barry: Welcome to Senior Care Corner. I'm Barry.

Kathy: And I'm Kathy. Thanks for joining us!

Barry: As always, you'll find us online at SeniorCareCorner.com with solutions, tools and information for family caregivers and others who care for and about senior adults.

Got a little bit of different feature segment for you today, we want to talk about who might be a family caregiver and we're taking an interesting approach to it. At least one we hope you'll find interesting. But before we get there, Kathy, I believe you have some news items?

Kathy: I certainly do! The first news item:

Balance, Strength Training Reduce Falls for Elderly, a Study Finds

A new study finds more evidence that seniors who engage in balance and strength training exercise can significantly reduce their risk of falls.

Researchers found that incorporating these exercises into their routine activities reduced falls by nearly one third. Unfortunately, they found that less than 10% of older adults regularly participate in strength training and even fewer exercise to improve their balance.

Over 300 men and women aged 70 or older who had fallen at least twice or injured themselves in a fall in the preceding year were studied. These people were assigned to one of three different exercise programs.

One group incorporated balance and lower limb strength training into the participants' daily routines. Another group was given a structured exercise program to complete three times a week. And the third group was a control group assigned gentle exercises not thought to aid balance.

A record of falls over the next year, progress on balance tests and measurements of the participants' quality of life and daily activities was made for all participants.

Group one, the lifestyle integrated group, showed a 31% decline in falls compared to the control group as well as an improvement in all other activity measurements. Researchers found that there was better adherence to the program in this lifestyle integrated group.

Group two, those that did structured exercises three times a week, had an insignificant change in fall rates.

Researchers stress the importance of fall prevention and that falls should not be considered a normal part of aging. Therapeutic exercises and enjoyable activities can prevent falls.

Barry: That's a great line. "Falls should not be considered a normal part of aging." That's something that I wish many people would understand and act upon.

Kathy: So true. Alright our second news item today:

Surveillance May Help Doctors Decide to Prescribe

A new study indicates that electronic health records may help doctors be more aware of the infections prevalent in their community and could therefore cut down on unnecessary antibiotic prescriptions.

Since doctors often prescribe antibiotic when it isn't clear whether or not a bacterial infection is the cause of the symptoms such as fever, runny nose and cough, researchers feel that this information could reduce over use of antibiotics. Excessive antibiotic use can lead to drug resistant strains that will be harder to treat the next time.

Researchers reviewed the electronic health records of 28,000 patients who saw one of the 69 doctors at North Shore's hospitals during the flu season between 2006 and 2011.

They found that doctors on average prescribed antibiotics 45% of the time when people complained of flu-like symptoms. Because respiratory infections are usually viral, taking an antibiotic will provide no benefit and can cause unintended adverse outcomes. Some doctors were found to prescribe antibiotics up to 84% of the time to their patients.

Researchers found that during the height of the flu season when known viral infections were in the community, prescription use of antibiotics dropped especially when doctors saw patients in the previous week with similar symptoms.

Researchers stress the importance of hospitals alerting doctors to what is going on around in their community to help them make better decisions and should be utilizing the electronic health records to improve patient care.

Barry: My goodness, more information is a benefit, who would've thought that?

Kathy: It's great to know that all this electronic information can be used anywhere around the country and doctors should really be talking part in that electronic information.

Barry: Well that's the key! The information's out there. But someone's got to make sure it's disseminated and then used.

Kathy: That's correct. Alright our third news item today:

More Evidence that Exercise Keeps Aging Brains Healthy

Recently, four clinical trials confirmed that if you want to keep your brain healthy as you age, you need to exercise your body.

Results of the four trials were reported at the Alzheimer's Association International Conference.

Walking for exercise was found to slow the memory loss associated with Alzheimer's. One group walked for 30-45 minutes three days a week. Another group just stretched and toned. After one year, the walkers increased the size of the part of the brain associated with memory. Most Alzheimer's patients show a significant shrinking of this same part of the brain.

The exercise was moderate in nature and showed great changes in the brain after only one year. Despite the results, it is unclear why exercise will result in a reduction of the risk of cognitive impairment in older adults.

In another study, women age 70-80 years who walked and performed resistance training by lifting weights had improved performance in their ability to sustain attention and memory. Resistance training has shown to be a particularly valuable activity for older adults.

Seniors who walk slower in both pace and length of their steps had a greater cognitive function decline.

These studies are just more pieces of the puzzle as researchers learn more about Alzheimer's disease.

Barry: Interesting. I guess the more we know, the closer hopefully, we're getting to do something about it.

Kathy: Alright in our fourth and final news item, we're going to be talking about exercise again:

Exergames Can Help Inactive Folks Get Moving

But active video gamers may not reach recommended levels of physical activity

A recent study suggests that active video games or exergames are not as good as actual exercise but they can help people, especially seniors, get more active.

While active video games are not a cure for physical inactivity, researchers found that exergames can encourage inactive people to keep moving even after they turn off the video game.

The researchers reviewed 41 previous studies of active video games. They found that three games were effective in boosting the level of physical activity among participating adults. However, most games fell short of the recommended 30 minute of activity daily recommended for adults.

The games are useful for populations that are more suitable to lighter activity such as seniors. They are especially effective when used during a structured exercise program. Exergames are most useful to get seniors moving when they are used consistently and for at least 30 minutes each session.

Barry: Well that's another very interesting thing. I guess learning more and get those things applied and improve the quality of life not only for our senior loved ones, but for probably a lot fits there for us too.

Kathy: We just need to remember to stay moving! Keep moving!

Barry: So true! Well thanks Kathy, a great set of articles there. I really appreciate it. Now it's time to have a little bit of fun, I guess otherwise known as our feature segment.

Here at Senior Care Corner we talk a great deal about the need for family caregivers to also pay attention to their own needs, really because doing so will help keep them in the best position, both physically and mentally to give their best to the others under their care. We discuss in a

number of posts and podcasts episodes the need for caregivers to create support networks, to line up backup care so they can get away from time to time and to tend to their OWN medical needs – something far too often overlook by busy family caregivers. We consider it one of the most important topics we cover because caring for yourself SHOULD be a key aspect of caring for others.

That being said, while preparing THIS discussion we realized that while we have a category for “Family Caregivers” on the site; we needed to add one for “Caring for Family Caregivers”, which we have remedied. Visitors can now go to the Posts by Topic box on the home page, select that topic and get a list of the posts and podcasts covering it.

We know from the feedback we get many of you realize the importance of caring for the needs of family caregivers. What we are learning though from many we encounter in person and online is that many family caregivers don’t consider themselves to be caregivers. You hear that frequently in your conversations with family members of seniors, don’t you Kathy?

Kathy: Yes as a matter of fact, I do. I often have people tell me “I’m just doing what my spouse needs me to be doing, I’m not really a caregiver” or “my parents need a little help – that doesn’t make me a caregiver, does it?” I think people mean that in a good way, that what they’re doing is just part of being a family, it’s not a burden that they’re being forced to carry. It’s terrific that they feel that way. After all, keeping a positive outlook keeps things from weighing one down as much emotionally.

The downside of not considering ourselves to be family caregivers is that it keeps us from understanding the impact the role we take with family members has on our own wellbeing and thus reaching out for the help we might need.

Barry: That’s true Kathy. Those who don’t consider themselves to be caregivers wouldn’t see “caring for the caregiver” applying to them, would they?

Kathy: That’s right. Not understanding that one is a caregiver can result in overlooking your own needs that are put aside as you fulfill the caregiving role. The benefits of that positive outlook can be outweighed by ignoring impacts that the time and effort put into meeting the needs of others can have on the caregiver’s physical and emotional health. Over time, that reduces the effectiveness of a caregiver so nobody is really benefitting.

Barry: That leads us to the focus of our feature segment in this episode - - helping family caregivers to understand that they are, indeed, caregivers and thus understand they have their own needs that must be met in addition to the needs of those for whom they care.

Now in putting this together we decided to have a little bit of fun with it in hopes it will help family caregivers see themselves in it AND see wearing the caregiver label as a positive.

We both enjoy the humor of Jeff Foxworthy –

Kathy: and appreciate that it’s something we can enjoy with the whole family!

Barry: Especially his trademark “you might be a redneck” routines - and decided to apply it to our topic today. We may well fall on our faces. But at least we’ve had fun preparing for this episode.

Okay, enough buildup. Here we go.

If you have an aging parent living with you because they are unable to meet their own needs YOU MIGHT BE A FAMILY CAREGIVER.

Kathy: That’s an easy one, of course, but we’re starting with it because many family members don’t see themselves as caregivers UNLESS they are filling a role like that. Even so, there are complications with this situation that many miss.

Barry: That’s right, Kathy. Those caring for aging family members and their own children have greater pressures on them. They’re what we call the middle of the triple decker sandwich, providing care to both older and younger generations and often getting pulled in too many directions at once. If you fall into this category you particularly need to have a support network in place because going it alone, as too many try to do, can wear one down and reduce caregiving effectiveness.

Kathy: Our second one is related to this and one many people miss...

Barry: If your grandparent is living in your home and you are helping out in meeting some of their needs YOU MIGHT BE A FAMILY CAREGIVER.

Kathy: That role is something in which many teens find themselves. They may be key members of their parents’ support network, often looking out for their grandparents while the parents are at work or are busy; they may run errands or fill other needs. This can be very fulfilling for teens but it should also be recognized it may be reducing the time available for other activities and that they may feel a pull from their friends presenting options that often seem more attractive.

It may be a role for the parents – who admittedly have a full plate being in the middle of the sandwich – to make sure children and teens are able to balance their lives and to assure their efforts are recognized.

Barry: Now the next several we’ve got here will explain that your senior loved ones don’t have to be living in the same home with you in order for you to be a family caregiver.

Kathy: If you run errands for or with an aging family member who isn’t able to get out of the house on their own, such as doing their grocery shopping or picking up their prescriptions, YOU MIGHT BE A FAMILY CAREGIVER.

Barry: That’s right, not all caregiver roles are live-in or even full time. There are others along the same line. For example:

If you make sure your senior loved ones get to their doctors and other healthcare appointments on time YOU MIGHT BE A FAMILY CAREGIVER.

Kathy: If you help aging parents or grandparents with laundry or other housekeeping tasks YOU MIGHT BE A FAMILY CAREGIVER.

Barry: If you mow their lawn or do other yard work YOU MIGHT BE A FAMILY CAREGIVER.

Kathy: If you stop by and prepare meals from time to time or take them out to dinner at their favorite eatery YOU MIGHT BE A FAMILY CAREGIVER.

Barry: Many family members are probably seeing themselves in one or more of these and had thought of themselves as simply helping out, as you said before Kathy, not that they are indeed family caregivers.

Now, all family caregiver roles are clearly not the same and don't have the same impacts on the lives of the caregivers. Still, the time, effort -- and personal commitment -- that go into the activities that make them family caregivers of senior loved ones are above and beyond what's required for jobs, school, raising their own children and much more.

Kathy: We don't want to give the impression you have to be in the homes of aging family members full time or even live nearby to be family caregivers.

If you spend a vacation doing home renovations to make your senior loved one's home a safer or more comfortable place in which they can age in place YOU MIGHT BE A FAMILY CAREGIVER.

Barry: If you spend a weekend installing a home monitoring system that lets your loved ones' healthcare providers check their activity and vital signs remotely YOU MIGHT BE A FAMILY CAREGIVER.

Kathy: If you arrange for senior loved ones to visit your home for a long weekend or other periods to give a break to family members with whom they normally live YOU MIGHT BE A FAMILY CAREGIVER.

Barry: If you stop by and set your grandparents' smartphones, tablets or computer, create accounts on Facebook and show them how to use it securely to communicate with others and engage the world around them, you guessed it, YOU MIGHT BE A FAMILY CAREGIVER.

Kathy: If you attend care plan meetings and family counsels in senior loved ones' long term care facility and act as their advocate to assure their needs are met YOU MIGHT BE A FAMILY CAREGIVER.

Barry: Yes there are SO many ways to provide care and show you care that don't require major time commitments but still impact the lives your senior loved ones lead, especially if they have chosen aging in place rather than moving to a senior living facility. Not only are you impacting their lives, of course, but your own as well. Yes, there are benefits you gain from doing so but other impacts on your lives that you need to recognize at the same time.

There are many roles for caregivers that CAN be and are regularly performed from a distance, as many family members who live hundreds or even thousands of miles from their senior loved ones know well. Yes, we have some of these for you, too!

Kathy: If you call your senior loved ones on a regular basis to check on their wellbeing YOU MAY BE A FAMILY CAREGIVER.

Barry: If you monitor aging family members' credit card and other financial accounts online to protect against fraud or their own overspending YOU MAY BE A FAMILY CAREGIVER.

Kathy: If you look up healthcare information online to help loved ones identify and understand what they are going through and what they can expect in the future YOU MIGHT BE A FAMILY CAREGIVER.

Barry: If you are paying some of the bills for your aging parents because pensions, social security and savings are insufficient to meet their needs YOU MIGHT BE A FAMILY CAREGIVER.

Kathy: If you urge your senior loved ones to document their end of life wishes through wills and living wills, including DNR orders and other advance directives and follow through with them to put it all in place YOU MIGHT BE A FAMILY CAREGIVER.

Barry: You've probably gotten the point by now and have more ideas about things you are doing already that make you a family caregiver as well. The role is as individual as our loved ones and their needs. Not to mention what we are in a position to provide in order to help them meet those needs.

Our real point, though, is not that people should be doing things to be caregivers, which is a very personal thing of course, but that those who ARE caregivers recognize that fact and what it means to your own lives.

Kathy: Now that we've helped build an understanding of what makes someone a family caregiver, we will go back to providing posts and podcasts to help caregivers improve the lived of their aging family members. Back to discussions of technology, healthcare, diet, activities, safety, everyday living and other topics that YOU can use to help senior loved ones, with a particular focus on those who are choosing aging in place.

Barry: Before we do that, Kathy, I do have just ONE more I was hoping to slip in here.

Kathy: I was afraid you might.

Barry: There is one more SIMPLE thing that many people do but don't realize the importance in the lives of their aging family members.

Kathy: Alright Barry, go ahead.

Barry: If you stop by the home or nursing home of senior loved ones from time to time simply to chat, making them a part of your life and you theirs, YOU MIGHT BE A FAMILY CAREGIVER.

Kathy: That is a good one and a good way to wrap up this feature segment.

Barry: Thanks, Kathy. Now with that, I suspect you are ready to wrap up this episode with a quick tip.

Kathy: I sure am! Today's quick tip is:

Help Prevent Malnutrition in Seniors

Caregivers of seniors are often concerned with the vulnerability of their family members to developing malnutrition as they age and their intakes begin to decline.

The American Academy of Family Physicians offers these tips for family caregivers:

1. Provide plenty of healthy foods and snacks and keep the foods accessible
2. Flavor foods with fresh herbs and spices avoiding salt
3. Offer prepackaged supplements when meals are refused or taken poorly
4. Promote daily exercise, even a little bit throughout the day, to help stimulate appetite and keep muscles strong
5. Plans social engagements centered around eating and exercise

Hopefully these reminders will give your seniors a boost in their health!

Barry: Thanks Kathy! Yet another great quick tip; and another great way to wrap up our episode for today.

And we thank you folks for joining us and we hope that you've had a little bit of fun but understand the point that we were trying to make. We hope you'll stop by and visit us at SeniorCareCorner.com and leave your own thoughts and comments, and even some suggestions for us.

You can also stop by Senior Care Corner on Facebook and you know jot a note for us down on the wall.

And last but certainly not least, we hope you'll stop by the Senior Care Corner bookstore, the link is right on our homepage there, in fact I think it's on each of the pages of our site. Stop by, I'm sure you'll find some resources that will help you make the lives of your senior loved ones just a little bit better.

And until next time, we hope everybody has a great day!