



Maintenance Is Required

Caregiving demands taking care of yourself, too.

My car warns me when the time for maintenance is approaching. At first, the message—"Maintenance Required Soon"—appears only when I start the car, lasts for a few seconds, and then fades away. If I ignore the message past a certain point, it stays on all the time and changes to "MAINTENANCE REQUIRED!" Having this emphatic warning staring at me while I drive is unnerving, and I usually take the car in soon after.

The last time this happened, I commented to my husband, Steve, that I take better care of my car than I do myself. While this is a problem for most of us, with everything that tugs at our time and attention, for those with the added responsibility of caregiving it can be especially difficult.

Having the responsibility for the health and well-being of another person changes your life, sometimes for the better. In this issue of *Neurology Now*, we learn how caring for a mother with Alzheimer's disease brought the Eikenberry-Tucker family closer. The family faced a very difficult emotional situation, but by openly acknowledging their feelings, they enhanced their relationships with each other and with Jill Eikenberry's mother.

Those of us who are parents know that balancing our own needs with those of our children can be like walking a tight rope. Maintaining good relationships with our friends and spouse takes more work and planning than ever before. As your children grow up, new priorities and routines continually emerge. Change can be stressful, but we can take a lesson from the Eikenberry-Tucker family: Recognizing the stressors and talking honestly about the effects they are having on us with family and friends can make an enormous difference in the quality of our lives.

Several years ago, my husband and I experienced another life-changing shift in our roles as caregivers. Our girls were on their own, but Steve's parents and

brother moved from another city to live near us in San Antonio. All three have significant health problems that require my husband's involvement on a daily basis. It sometimes seems as though our world revolves around providing this care.

Steve's dad has Alzheimer's disease but is spry with a great sense of humor. His brother suffered a serious head injury as a child that left him with weakness and balance problems, but he is caring and always looks on the bright side. His mom, a caregiver all her life for Steve's brother and other family members, is now battling the final stages of cancer. But her biggest concern is that her husband and son will be cared for after she dies.

It has taken us time, tearful discussions, and lots of support from our friends and daughters to adjust to life as we know it now. Caregiving may be hard, but it also comes with enriching experiences and enhanced relationships that may not be possible any other way.

Thank goodness for that message from my car—and the Eikenberry-Tucker story. It helped me recognize the importance of taking time to understand how these changes in my life are affecting my

emotional and physical health. It also helped me recognize that taking care of myself is crucial to being able to take care of someone else. If you have wisdom to share about caregiving, please let us know by emailing us at neurologynow@lwwny.com. And remember: Maintenance is required!

Take good care,

Robin L. Brey, M.D.
Editor-in-Chief



Several years ago, my husband and I became caregivers again.