



Local Health Commentary

A VIEW FROM THE VILLAGES HEALTH

Cold and flu season can be especially daunting for the 2.7 million Floridians who provide care for family members.

As the wearers of many hats, they often manage medical appointments, assist with activities of daily living, run errands, make meals, and ensure the comfort and safety of those who need them most. Unfortunately, their busy schedules and high stress levels can put their health at risk. Research shows that most have little or no support, and one-third of primary caregivers continue to provide intense care to others while suffering from poor health themselves. As a result, caregivers have a 15% lower level of antibody responses than non-caregivers, which makes them more susceptible to illness.

Becoming ill is a common concern among those who care for individuals with dementia. The list of what-if scenarios can be infinite and unnerving: What if I am hospitalized and unable to perform my duties? Yet most caregivers feel they owe it to their loved ones to do it all. Accepting help, however, is a powerful form of self-care, which ultimately benefits everyone.

Self-Care Is Significant to Caregiving

A caregiver's mental, emotional, and physical

health impacts those in their care. Because they are a team, taking care of themselves is in fact taking care of their loved ones. This is where self-care becomes significant. It begins with listening to their bodies, which means resting when they feel tired, drinking water when they are thirsty, eating when they are hungry, and checking in with their medical provider when they're not at their best. Waiting



Melissa Denham

until they are in the middle of an illness can prolong recovery, which also limits the care they can provide for a loved one.

Self-care breaks can be a potent mood booster. When a caregiver takes time to do something they enjoy, it allows them to reset and recharge. I caution caregivers to be discerning, however, and learn to separate their wants from their needs. For example, they may need to go to the grocery store but want to go to the park and read a book. Those 'need to' tasks will get done, but if the caregiver doesn't get a mental break from their responsibilities, it eventually affects their loved one.

Creating an Action Plan

Implementing a new routine can be tricky. In the dementia world, change can be unsettling, and disruptions can cause agitation, wandering or aggression. It may also be extremely difficult for individuals with dementia to return to their normal routine — if they are even able to do so. But creating an action plan for emergencies can ease concerns about those what-if scenarios.

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Caregivers can start by making a schedule for friends, family members, or neighbors who could step in to help care for the person living with dementia. It's also important to find community resources. For example, adult day programs provide a safe space for individuals who need care to socialize and be active while caregivers carve out time for themselves. Through The Villages Health Dementia Care Coordination Program, participants discover ways to build their support network and navigate everyday challenges.

Caring for others can at times feel overwhelming. You can't always prevent or predict difficult moments, disasters, disturbances, or illness, but you can increase your strength and stamina through everyday self-care habits.

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Positive Aging

BY MARILYN MURRAY WILLISON

Some population experts have referred to the increasing numbers of aging baby boomers as the "silver tsunami."

Longer life spans combined with an unusually large over-60 population segment could be seen as a major problem for both our economy and health care system. But this is not merely a problem here in the U.S. In fact, Japan appears to be feeling the effects of this trend even more starkly than we are.

While 18% of the American population was over 65 as of 2024, that number in Japan was almost 30%. One of the reasons for this graying of Japan is that it has the world's second-highest life expectancy, 84 years. (Just in case you're curious, Monaco is No. 1 with 89.8 years, and the U.S. life expectancy is 79.8 years.) The country also has little immigration and a low birth-rate. The number of births in 2016 fell below the 1 million mark for the first time.

Japan's workforce is aging, and fewer employees are willing (or able) to quit working once they reach the country's accepted retirement age of 60 — even though they qualify for a full state pension at age 65. According to OECD (a rich-country think tank),



Eugene Hoshiko | The Associated Press

An elderly woman wheels her luggage along a pedestrian crossing in Tokyo. While 18% of the U.S. population was over 65 as of 2024, that number in Japan was almost 30%.

men in Japan actually retire when they're close to 70. Some experts have noted that certain segments of the employment landscape have turned into what are called "grey jobs."

For example, Tokyo Gas, the country's largest supplier of residential natural gas, uses older workers to read meters or instruct homeowners about appliance usage. And according to government statistics, more than half of Japanese taxi drivers are over the age of 60. There's even an employment agency, Kore-isha, that provides temporary jobs exclusively to workers over the age of 60.

Even some airlines in Japan have petitioned the government to extend the mandatory retirement age for its pilots from 65 to 70.

While a shrinking labor force is seen by some as problematic, others are viewing it as a sign of profitable business

opportunity. For example, adult diapers reportedly outsell baby diapers in Japan. In 2013, the market was said to be growing at nearly 10% per year and pulling in \$1.5 billion. Since they sell for twice the amount of baby diapers — which means increased profitability — two major Japanese paper companies have begun expanding their manufacturing facilities to accommodate the expected growing market.

Marilyn Murray Willison has had a varied career as a six-time nonfiction author, columnist, motivational speaker and journalist in both the U.K. and the U.S. She is the author of *The Self-Empowered Woman* blog and the award-winning memoir *One Woman, Four Decades, Eight Wishes*. She can be reached at www.marilynwillison.com. To find out more about Marilyn and read her past columns, please visit the Creators Syndicate webpage at www.creators.com.

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