

# Wellness and the Hospice Caregiver

Cycling as a pathway to health for those who care for others

The desire to care for others is an admirable trait to be sure. As a loving family member, you may find yourself at a stage where you are responsible for the in-home care of a relative reaching the end of life. Or perhaps you are a hospice professional delivering services to your clients on a daily basis. Whatever your personal circumstances, you undoubtedly know that the emotional, social, mental and especially physical stresses of your job are enormous.

These stressful demands can take a tremendous toll on any caregiver's body and lead to serious illness, depression and burnout.



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An excellent self-assessment tool, which may provide insight into how one is coping, is available free from the American Medical Association. The 18-question survey (easily located online) asks caregivers to answer yes or no to statements prefaced by the phrase, "During the past week or so I have..."

Survey questions include:

- Felt completely overwhelmed.
- Felt a loss of privacy and/or personal time.
- Been edgy or irritable.
- Had back pain.
- Felt ill.

Once you have identified your need for personal help, check with your hospice organization for a list of local support groups and respite care to help address your emotional needs.

Then talk with your personal physician to determine if designing a weekly exercise program might be beneficial to your overall physical well-being.



COURTESY PHOTO

Matt Goforth and Julie Goforth, owners of On Your Mark Performance Center, say that short rides on a lifestyle bike may provide an excellent entry level outdoor activity for busy caregivers.

Ten minutes of brisk aerobic exercise a day is a good place to begin. If you need to be immediately available to your care receiver, you might measure a walking track around the inside of your house to do at a specified time each day. Or, consider acquiring a stationary bike to pedal for 10 minutes several times each day.

Outdoor activities, such as swimming, walking or cycling, are preferable whenever brief respite care for the family member can be arranged.

"A short ride on a lifestyle bicycle can provide an excellent entry level outdoor activity for a busy caregiver," states Julie Goforth of the OYM Performance Center Team. "Individuals are always welcome to come by the store to complete an interview process and ask questions when considering starting or upgrading a cycling program of any type," she continues.

At least two and a half hours of aerobic exercise per week should be the hospice caregiver's ultimate goal in order to establish a personal level of wellness. In addition to increasing the capacity of the lungs and heart musculature, regular aerobic exercise improves bone health, balance and a general feeling of well-being.

"We often see recreation-ists become enthusiasts. We're happy to help any level of cyclist achieve their personal fitness goals," OYM co-owner Matt Goforth concludes. ■



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