



THE CAREGIVERS'

By Mark L. Fuerst
Body & More

When Benna Golubtchik's doctor told her she needed surgery on her arthritic knee, she began searching for other treatments. "He told me it was age, that I had to accept it," says Golubtchik, a former New York City schoolteacher who now trains teachers.

She attended a stress management/fitness workshop run by Debbie Mandel. "I started taking better care of myself and doing the exercises," says Golubtchik, who's in her early 50s. "It took a few months until I felt better, but I was no longer limping or in pain. A change in attitude made me a little more active and gave me a lot more energy.

"And I didn't need surgery."

Making small changes in attitude and exercise, as Golubtchik did, is often all it takes to restore balance and take control of your busy life. Often, caregivers in the Sandwich Generation experience added stress because they're pulled between caring for their own kids and their aging parents. But forgetting to care about yourself is no way to care about the ones you love.

Fitness and optimism can give caregivers stamina and help slow down the clock on their own aging process. Arthritis, depression, anxiety, obesity, confusion, diabetes and cancer do not have to be part of growing older, says Mandel, author of the new book, "Changing Habits: The Caregiver's Total Workout" (Catholic Book Publishing, 2005).

The Changing Habits program stems from Mandel's experience as the caretaker of two parents with Alzheimer's

disease. She is the mother of three children, ages 5, 14 and 19, and also works full-time as a literature professor at Brooklyn and Queens colleges.

"I was so busy, I just went from one activity to another feeling fatigued," Mandel says. "I found that lifting weights could break up the nagging thoughts that I was not doing enough for my family. I began to feel grateful for what I had."

Many women's lives are shortened by giving away too much of themselves, Mandel says.

"They are overworked, absorb stress, eat to fill up emotionally and forget to take care of themselves. Not a healthy lifestyle!" she says.

Her program offers strategies and concrete tools to every woman who lives sandwiched between her children and aging parents, and to all women who are caught up in doing rather than being.

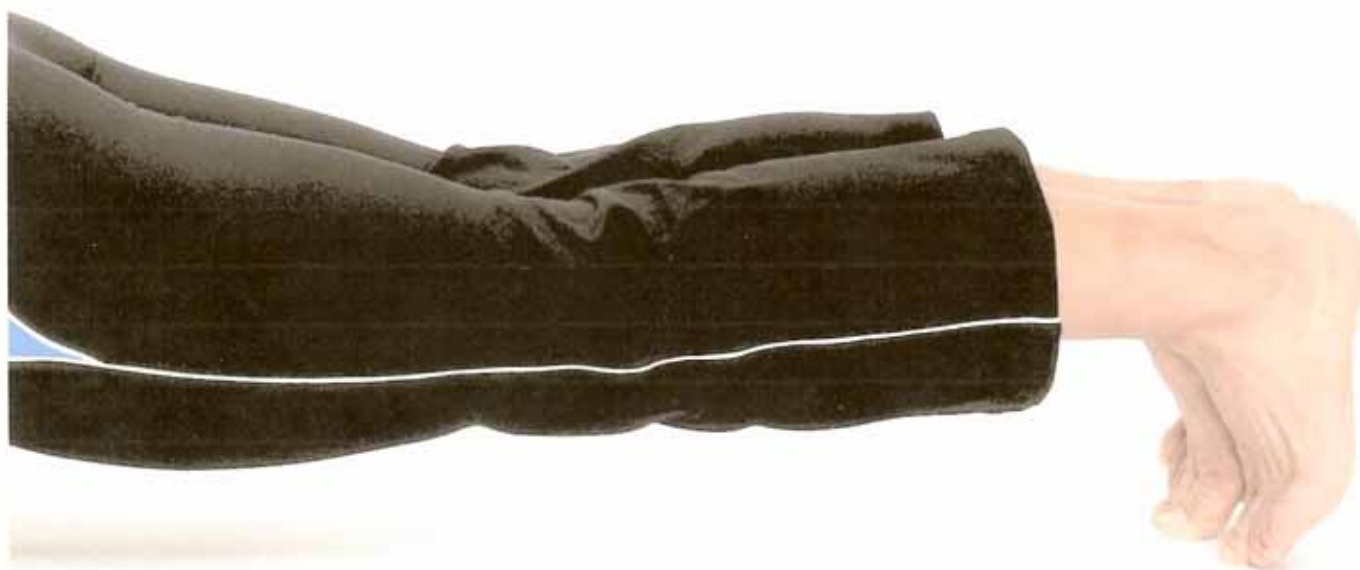
"Many women have lost their

personal identity," Mandel says. "Changing Habits is designed to create a healthy self-respect for body, mind and spirit."

With the help of trainer Frank Mikulka at the Hollywood Atrium Club in Lawrence, N.Y., Mandel developed an easy-to-follow, at-home, total body fitness program she calls Activity Alleviates Anxiety. Exercise sheds stress hormones and releases endorphins, the happiness hormones, she says. You begin to think more clearly and increase your ability to focus; you begin to feel more confident and stronger; it improves health and helps ward off chronic diseases such as high blood pressure, diabetes, obesity and high cholesterol levels; removes the fear of frailty that accompanies aging; and lowers the risk of cancer.

Mandel's mantra is to look at exercise as a lifetime.

"By exercising, we are exercising the right to make time for the self, get rid of toxic stress, release



the happiness hormones and, most important, generate the life-giving force that is our birthright," she says. "Exercise will extend your life and give you greater function, even stimulate your brain. After all, it is not about how long you live, but how much life there is in your years."

Mandel offers some simple guidelines when you are experiencing an energy crash due to bouts of intense busyness:

- Become aware of your feelings.
- Notice how uncomfortable you are.
- Make small changes gradually.
- Work out with a friend.
- Sign up for exercise classes in a gym or community center.
- Listen to music while exercising.
- Put on your sneakers and walk out the door. Sunlight will energize you.
- Buy a new pair of sneakers, fitness clothes, or a workout audio/video to help you get in an exercise groove.

■ Post motivating notes in your home, as a screen saver, or on the refrigerator.

■ Change your routine every four to six weeks to stay motivated.

"Your happiness and calmness are conveyed to others. Exercise will physiologically and spiritually restore your balance. Therefore, it is your moral obligation to exercise to generate positive feelings, which in turn transfer to others who will, in turn, pay it forward," Mandel says.

Golubchik now exercises several mornings each week for about 30 minutes when she wakes up. "I use free weights, do squats and upper body strength training, and also do an aerobic workout and stretch. It certainly has made me feel better. I'm stronger, I have more energy and I can do more. It's not true that because I have arthritis I have to slow down."

More important, "a change in attitude has made me a little

more active and that has made a big difference. I walk more, take the stairs instead of the elevator and make sure I eat right," Golubchik says. "I don't have to be a slave to the gym to feel more vital."

CHANGING HABITS EXERCISE PROGRAM

In a short span, you can exercise several large major muscle groups by performing compound movements.

"Compound exercises also correspond more realistically to activities of daily living and will help you to function better with greater strength and balance," Mandel says.

The following three exercises can be done in about 10 minutes. Do these exercises two to three times a week.

■ Pushups (works the chest and triceps muscles and "helps open up the heart emotionally," Mandel advises.)

Do a set of pushups using the arm of a couch. Make sure the

couch rests firmly against the wall (at least on one side) so it does not slide.

In the starting position, keep back straight, abdominal muscles pulled tight and hands positioned directly under your shoulders, fingers facing forward.

Extend your body full length with your weight on your toes.

Bend your elbows as far as they will go and push back up to the starting position.

When you can do two sets of 12 repetitions easily, then move to the floor for standard pushups and build up to two sets of 12.

■ Having-a-ball squats (works almost all muscles and provides some cardiovascular benefit)

Place a ball on the floor in front of you and get into a squat position, heels firmly planted, behind the ball.

Bend down, pick up the ball and, still in the squat position, hold it in front of your chest for a second.

Then, pushing off your

heels, stand up and lift your arms as if you were placing the ball high overhead on an imaginary shelf.

Exhale on exertion.

Do a set of 10. Aim for two sets of 12. When this feels easy, use a weighted medicine ball.

■ Wall marches (works leg muscles and provides an aerobic workout)

Stand with your feet shoulder width apart and position your hands shoulder width apart lightly touching the wall in front of you for stability.

Hold your abdominal muscles tight.

Then lift one leg high to your waist, forming a right angle. Exhale on exertion.

Do alternate leg lifts.

Aim for three sets of 20 or more. When this feels easy, do wall marches in between the other two exercises.

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