

You can't help everyone - my mother's story

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One thing I've learned the hard way is not everyone is ready or willing to improve their health, even when faced with grave circumstances. A perfect example is my mother. At 86 years old in the summer of 2021 my mother lived in a Cambridge senior apartments building. She has been a type 2 diabetic for years and was taking about 22 prescription pills. Her blood sugar numbers ranged as high as 700. She also has COPD, some kind of heart condition, and a noticeable loss of short term memory. There were paid helpers that come in to clean her apartment and try to manage her pills, but she often didn't take them. There would be little dishes of pills around the apartment as well as lots of bread, cereal, and candy. She would regularly call the ambulance to go to the hospital because she couldn't breathe well.

One time in the hospital they recommended my mother not go back to her apartment because she could not take care of herself. Because of this she ended up in a Princeton nursing home for some kind of therapy for about a month and a half. When that was over they recommended she stay in the nursing home, but my mother wanted to go back to her apartment. I talked with her and worked out a deal where I would come over to her apartment to make her food, give her the medications, and try to improve her health. I told her this would be hard because I was going to remove all the bad food and replace it with healthy food that I would cook. She agreed to this. So I cleaned out the entire apartment and threw away about 10 garbage bags of food, all the breads, cereals, sweets, candy, and pop. The cupboards were empty. Then I went out and bought lots of healthy meats, eggs, vegetables, tea, and water. She could eat as much as she wanted, but only twice a day without any snacks.

I cooked the meals and ate with her. I also checked her blood sugar before each meal. In the first week she did well and we got her blood sugar under 200 consistently, even as low as 150 once, and that was without any insulin shots. During this week she also didn't feel the need to use her nebulizer even once. She was finally making progress. Then in the second week I started finding bread and sweets back in her apartment. She was sneaking food in from the neighbors. I'd throw it all out and warned her if this continued she would end up right back in the hospital and nursing home again. Of course she didn't want to hear this and I became the bad guy.

This went on and on for almost two months and just got worse. One day while I was gone she called the hospital because she was having trouble breathing again. After a couple days of evaluation they again recommended she could not live by herself and suggested a nursing home. She wanted to go back to her apartment, but by this time I realized I could not help her because she just didn't want to help herself. This was hard for me because I had big plans and wanted to go on a cruise with her when we got her health turned around. I think the best we can do is get ourselves right and try to be an example to others.

Today she is in a new nursing home and doing well. She has a nice room with lots of structure and activities. It's the best place for her now.

