

Harping on my husband's health habits was hurting our marriage. There had to be a better way

Nag Not!

By **REBECCA CHAMAA**, San Diego, California

My husband, Jean-Claude, and I sat down to dinner. Our nightly conversation started up.

"What did you have for lunch today?" I asked.

"Pasta," Jean-Claude mumbled. He looked glum.

"Hmm," I said. "You need more fiber than that. Maybe you should supplement with a bean burrito tonight."

Jean-Claude shrugged.

"Did you exercise this morning?"

Another shrug. "I walked to the office," he said.

Jean-Claude is an architect. His office is a half-hour walk from our apartment.

"You need to ride the stationary bike each morning," I said. "Remember what the doctor said?"

A few months earlier, a routine colonoscopy had revealed that Jean-Claude is at high risk for colon cancer. His doctor recommended a health makeover. High-fiber diet. More exercise. Cut out the sweets and processed foods.

I was already on the alert about Jean-Claude's health after a major scare several years earlier. He had symptoms that initially looked like lymphoma. It turned out to be sarcoidosis, an autoimmune disease.

I became convinced my husband's health was extremely fragile. I feared every doctor's appointment. Every cough heralded doom. Never mind that Jean-Claude was able to work full-time and that we lived a full, active life together. My fears became disconnected from reality. I saw my wonderful, vital, loving husband as a ticking health time bomb.

It got worse after the colonoscopy. I nagged him mercilessly about his diet and exercise. We hardly talked about anything else. I monitored his every move and meal. I could tell he was wilting under my constant scrutiny. Yet I couldn't stop.

I've struggled with anxiety most of my life. Midway through our 25-year marriage, I was diagnosed with a mental illness—schizophrenia. For me, the

most disruptive symptoms are anxiety and paranoia. Medication has helped. I also rely on prayer, setting aside regular time to talk with God, combining it with meditation and breathing exercises.

All along, Jean-Claude was my rock. He could always find a way to bring out the best in me. We could laugh and be silly together. Until now.

Nothing I tried helped. I started off each day with good intentions. Then I'd notice Jean-Claude wasn't eating a high-fiber breakfast. The words were out of my mouth before I could stop them: "Wouldn't high-fiber cereal be better?"

Then it was off to the races. "What are you planning for lunch today? There's still time to hop on the bike before you go to work."

Jean-Claude is patience personified. He never snapped at me. He just retreated into himself. It used to feel as if we never had enough time for everything we wanted to say

IN SICKNESS AND IN HEALTH

Rebecca and Jean-Claude have always supported each other as they faced challenges.



COURTESY REBECCA CHAMAA