

Empower Minds.
Strengthen Bodies.
Inspire Creativity.

If you are providing care to someone (especially someone with Alzheimer's) taking care of yourself is just as important as taking care of the other person.

More than 65 million Americans—two-thirds of whom are women—are taking care of a disabled or ailing family member.

Listed below are suggestions to consider regardless if you are new to being in a caregiver role or have been in it for some time:

1. **It is critical to take care of your own health.**

You need to make sure to take care of yourself by eating well, monitoring your stress level and engaging in non-caregiver activities as much as possible. Try to prepare larger meals from which you can freeze leftovers to create quick/easy heat-up meals. Make sure you get adequate sleep and physical exercise. Use the periods when the person you are caring for is sleeping to exercise, do stress relieving activities (favorite leisure activities) or simply do what you want to do.

2. **Don't be afraid to ask for help.**

Simply having a neighbor/friend provide assistance by grocery shopping/running errands, cooking a meal, etc. can be a life saver. Caregiver services are commercially available in most locations. The National Alliance for Caregiving, www.caregiving.org, can help you locate caregiver services and choose among long-term care options.

3. **Utilize resources to help educate yourself.**

The Alzheimer's Association (www.alz.org) is an excellent organizational resource. They can provide extensive resource/reference and educational information. In addition, they can assist you in identifying what resources exist in your local area (support groups, senior services, etc.) and identifying physicians in your area who specialize in dealing with Alzheimer's. It is also very important to educate yourself on what to expect as the disease progresses and prepare yourself and your home to maintain a safe environment.

4. **Functional and Behavioral Deterioration.**

A person with Alzheimer's may develop behaviors including mood swings, verbal and/or physical aggression, combativeness and wandering. It is important that a caregiver gains an understanding of how to deal with potential behaviors and learn the appropriate level/style of communication to provide as the Alzheimer's progresses. Specific strategies include:

Pharmacological Treatments: Medications are available that have been shown to address some of the cognitive impairment deficits experienced by people with early Alzheimer's. In addition, medication intervention maybe needed to address the behavioral symptoms exhibited.

Maximizing Independence: Maintaining a person who has Alzheimer's highest functional ability (mobility, self-care, feeding, etc.) helps to provide a sense of worth to the person and to decrease caregiver burden. In addition, maintaining (even improving) the strength of a person with Alzheimer's has been shown to improve/maintain mobility and self-care ability. It is important to learn what strategies/interventions you need to do to assure the highest functional level is maintained at all times. Learning what adaptive equipment is recommended to address functional/safety issues is extremely important to decrease caregiver burden and maintain a safe home environment.

Sleep Management: Sleep issues/problems are often experienced by people with Alzheimer's disease and is a major cause of caregiver stress/burnout. Specific strategies exist that can be incorporated to minimize sleep issues.

Alleviating Caregiver Stress (resources)

Resources:

American Association for Geriatric Psychiatry (www.AAGPonline.org) Offers brochures and referral services for geriatric mental health

American Association of Retired People AARP (www.aarp.org) Numerous resources related to Alzheimer's and being a caregiver.

Administration on Aging, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (www.aoa.gov) Online resource of materials and programs for older Americans and their families.

Alzheimer's Association (www.alz.org)

Alzheimer's Disease Education and Referral (ADEAR) Center (www.alzheimers.org) Offers numbers guides and handouts/resources.

Eldercare Locator (www.eldercare.gov) Assists people in locating aging services in communities throughout the US.

National Alliance for Caregiving (www.caregiving.org) Online database of resources to help family caregivers.

National Council on the Aging (www.ncoa.org) Offers caregiver and patient guides.

National Family Caregivers Association (www.nfcacares.org) provide support to family caregivers.

National Institute of Mental Health (www.nimh.nih.gov) Offers fact sheets on depression and anxiety disorders.

National Institute on Aging (www.nia.nih.gov) Offers various caregivers guides and fact sheets.

National Mental Health Association (www.nmha.org) Provides information on mental illnesses and treatments as well as referrals for local services.

The National Institute on Aging (www.nia.nih.gov) offers an excellent publication "Caring for a Person with Alzheimer's Disease." The publication (#12-6173) is available for free.

