

CAREGIVING AND ALZHEIMERS/DEMENTIA

According to The Alzheimer's Association:

Fact: the number of Americans with Alzheimer's disease (currently 5.9 million) and other dementias will grow each year as the proportion of the U.S. population that is over 65 continues to increase. The number will escalate rapidly in coming years as the baby boom generation ages.

Fact: Nearly 15 million Americans provide unpaid care for a person with Alzheimer's disease or another dementia.

Caring for a loved one with Alzheimer's or any other kind of dementia presents many challenges. Memory loss is the best known symptom or warning sign, but these diseases also cause loss of judgment and orientation and the ability to understand and effectively communicate. These individuals require high levels of supervision and personal care. Caregivers report that they frequently experience high levels of stress. Too much stress can be damaging to both a caregiver and the person with Alzheimer's.

Taking care of you is one of the most important ways to be a healthy caregiver.

- **Know what resources are available.** Adult day care, in-home assistance, visiting nurses and Meals-on-Wheels are just some of the services that can help you.
- **Become an educated caregiver.** As the disease progresses, new care giving skills are necessary. Find information on alz.org or contact your local Alzheimer's Association.
- **Get help.** You are not failing as a caregiver by asking others for assistance. Seek the support of family, friends and community resources. Alzheimer's Association support group meetings are a good source of comfort and reassurance.
- **Take care of yourself.** Watch your diet, exercise and get plenty of rest. Make time for shopping, lunch with friends or even a golf outing. Take advantage of community services such as adult day care or in-home companion services to care for your loved one while you take a break.
- **Manage your stress level.** Stress can cause physical problems and changes in behavior. If you experience symptoms of caregiver stress, use relaxation techniques that work for you, and consult your doctor.
- **Accept changes as they occur.** People with Alzheimer's change and so do their needs. They often require care beyond what you can provide on your own. Look into care services such as in-home caregiver services and residential care.
- **Do legal and financial planning.** Consult an attorney to discuss legal, financial and care issues. If possible and appropriate, involve the person with Alzheimer's and other family members.
- **Be realistic.** Many of the behaviors that occur are beyond your control and the control of the person with Alzheimer's. Grieve your losses, but also focus on the positive moments.
- **Give yourself credit.** You are doing the best you can. Don't feel guilty because you can't do more. Your loved one needs you and you are there that should make you
 - feel proud.
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- To view the 10 warning signs of Alzheimer's and to access resources visit the Alzheimer's Association web site at www.alz.org

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