

Alzheimer *Society*

Alzheimer's disease and other dementias

Reducing caregiver stress



Supporting a person with dementia requires time and energy. While it can be a rewarding experience, it can also be demanding and stressful. Knowing and recognizing signs of stress in yourself or someone you care about is the first step towards taking action.

If the following symptoms occur, call your doctor or contact your local Alzheimer Society for help.

10 signs of caregiver stress

Sign 1 Denial

...about the disease and its effect on the person with the disease.

"Everyone is overreacting. I know my parent will get better."

Sign 2 Anger

...at the person with dementia, yourself and others.

"If they ask me that question once more I will scream!"

Sign 3 Withdrawing socially

...you no longer want to stay in touch with friends or participate in activities you once enjoyed.

"I don't care about getting together with friends anymore."

Sign 4 Anxiety

...about facing another day and what the future holds.

"I'm worried about what will happen when I can no longer provide care."

Sign 5 Depression

...you feel sad and hopeless a lot of the time.

"I don't care anymore. What is wrong with me?"

Sign 6 Exhaustion

...you barely have the energy to complete your daily tasks.

"I don't have the energy to do anything anymore."

Sign 7 Sleeplessness

...you wake up in the middle of the night or have nightmares and stressful dreams.

"I rarely sleep through the night, and don't feel refreshed in the morning."

Sign 8 Emotional reactions

...you cry at minor upsets; you are often irritable.

"I cried when there was no milk for my coffee this morning. Then I yelled at my child."

Sign 9 Lack of concentration

...you have trouble focusing and you find it difficult completing complex tasks.

"I used to do the daily crossword. Now I am lucky if I can solve half of it."

Sign 10 Health problems

...you may lose or gain weight, get sick more often (colds, flu), or develop chronic health problems (backaches, high blood pressure).

"Since the spring, I have had either a cold or the flu. I just can't seem to shake them."

10 ways to reduce caregiver stress

As a caregiver, you need to take care of yourself. You may well be the most important person in the life of the person with dementia. The suggestions below will help maintain your health and well-being.

Learn about dementia

Knowing as much as you can about dementia and care strategies will prepare you for the dementia journey. Understanding how dementia affects the person will also help you comprehend and adapt to the changes.

Be realistic about dementia

It is important, though difficult, to be realistic about dementia and how it will affect the person over time. Once you are realistic, it will be easier for you to adjust your expectations.

Be realistic about yourself

You need to be realistic about how much you can do. What do you value most? A walk with the person you are caring for, time by yourself, or a tidy house? There is no “right” answer; only you know what matters most to you and how much you can do.

Accept your feelings

When caring for a person with dementia, you will have many mixed feelings. In a single day, you may feel content, angry, guilty, happy, sad, embarrassed, afraid and helpless. These feelings may be confusing. But they are normal. Recognize that you are doing the best you can.

Share information and feelings with others

Sharing information about dementia with family and friends will help them understand what is happening and prepare them to provide the help and support you need.

It is also important to share your feelings. Find someone you feel comfortable talking with about your feelings. This may be a close friend or family member, someone you met at a support group, a member of your faith community, or a healthcare professional.





Be positive

Your attitude can make a difference to the way you feel. Try to look at the positive side of things. Focusing on what the person can do, as opposed to the abilities lost, can make things easier. Try to make every day count. There can still be times that are special and rewarding.

Look for humour

While dementia is serious, you may find certain situations have a bright side. Maintaining a sense of humour can be a good coping strategy.

Take care of yourself

Your health is important. Do not ignore it. Eat proper meals and exercise regularly. Find ways to relax and try to get the rest you need. Make regular appointments with your doctor for check-ups. You also need to take regular breaks from caregiving. Do not wait until you are too exhausted to plan this. Take time to maintain interests

and hobbies. Keep in touch with friends and family so you will not feel lonely and isolated. These things will give you strength to continue providing care.

Get help

Support: You will need the support that comes from sharing thoughts and feelings with others. This could be individually, with a professional or as part of a dementia support group. Choose the form of support with which you are most comfortable.

Practical help: It can be hard to ask for and accept help. But asking for help is not a sign of inadequate caregiving. You cannot care for a person with dementia alone. Ask family and friends for help. Most people will be willing to assist you. Programs in your community may offer help with household chores or caregiving tasks. Your local Alzheimer Society can help you access these.

Plan for the future

Planning for the future can help relieve stress. If possible, review finances with the person with dementia and plan accordingly. Choices relating to future health and personal care decisions should be considered and recorded. Legal and estate planning should also be discussed. As well, think about an alternate caregiving plan in the event that you are unable to provide care in the future.

The **Alzheimer Society** is the leading nationwide health charity for people living with Alzheimer's disease and other dementias. Active in communities across Canada, the Society:

- Offers information, support and education programs for people with dementia, their families and caregivers
- Funds research to find a cure and improve the care of people with dementia
- Promotes public education and awareness of Alzheimer's disease and other dementias to ensure people know where to turn for help
- Influences policy and decision-making to address the needs of people with dementia and their caregivers.

Contact your local Alzheimer Society for more information. Visit alzheimer.ca/helpnearyou.

Help for Today. Hope for Tomorrow...[®]

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