

Know the signs of caregiver stress and what to do about it

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Symptoms of Alzheimer's disease include more than memory loss. People with Alzheimer's have trouble communicating, learning, thinking and reasoning and the symptoms get worse over time. That may leave you in a position of providing ever more care and support for your loved one.

More information

Alz.org

Caregiving is a rewarding act of love, but it's not always easy. Depending on the support your loved one needs, caregiving can strain you physically and emotionally. Even put your own health at risk. So how do you know if you are experiencing caregiver stress? Ask yourself the following:

- Are you denying/ignoring symptoms of the disease and their impact on your loved one?
- Are you angry at your loved one for not being himself?
- Are you angry that no cure for Alzheimer's exists or that others around you don't understand what's happening?
- Are you depressed?
- Are you exhausted?
- Are you irritable?
- Are you having trouble sleeping?
- Are you having trouble concentrating?
- Are you avoiding friends or social activities that once brought you pleasure?
- Are you worried about facing another day and/or about dealing with the future?
- Are you having health problems that are beginning to take a mental and physical toll on you?

All of the above can be signs of caregiver stress. It's important that you maintain your health and well-being so you can be there to care for your loved one. Try the following to help manage caregiver stress:

- Get a diagnosis early for your loved one. It can be easy to explain away changing or unusual behavior when someone seems physically healthy. But uncertainty is stressful. Consult a doctor when you see changes in memory, mood or behavior. Don't delay. Some symptoms are treatable, and your doctor can help you better anticipate future needs and clarify the unknown.

- **Get help.** Trying to do everything by yourself will leave you exhausted. Seek the support of family, friends and community resources. Contact your local Alzheimer’s Association for help finding services such as adult day programs, in-home assistance, visiting nurses and meal delivery – a few of the many services that can help you manage daily tasks.
- **Accept changes as they occur.** People with Alzheimer’s change and so do their needs. Accept that your loved one may require care beyond what you can provide on your own. Accept the support and assistance of those around you.
- **Slow your communication.** Trouble communicating is one of the symptoms of Alzheimer’s, but flexibly, patience and a few simple rules can help. Address your loved one by her name. Speak slowly using short and simple words. Focus on emotions not facts. Use nonverbal communication like pointing or gesturing. Break instructions down into single steps and give her plenty of time to respond.
- **Take care of yourself.** Watch your diet, exercise and get plenty of rest. Join an Alzheimer’s support group to learn from and share with others in similar situations. Take time to get regular checkups and watch for symptoms of caregiver stress. Above all, seek help. You can’t care for your loved one if you are sick yourself.
- **Give yourself credit, not guilt.** Know that the care you provide makes a difference and understand you are doing the best you can. You may feel guilty because you can’t do more, but your role is to see that your loved one is safe and well cared for, by you or others with the ability to do so.

For help accessing resources, assistance coping with caregiver stress, and connection to local caregiver workshops and support groups call the Alzheimer’s Association’s 24/7 Helpline at (800) 272-3900. Translators are available.

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