



## Tips for Understanding the Effects of Alzheimer's on the Family

Families of loved ones with Alzheimer's disease are often referred to as the "invisible second patients." Like their afflicted loved one, families live with the heartbreak of this destructive and progressive disease on a daily basis. The ripple effect of Alzheimer's within a household can be equally depressing and disruptive. Therefore, it is important to be prepared and have a plan to protect yourself.

### The Effects of Alzheimer's on Family Caregivers

[Henry Brodaty](#), MD, author of **Family Caregivers of People with Dementia**, states, "The effects on caregivers are diverse and complex." They include:

**Increased Risk of Physical Illness** – Caregivers report a greater number of physical health problems and worse overall health compared with noncaregivers. Caregivers are at increased risk of various problems including cardiovascular problems, lower immunity, poor sleep patterns, slower wound healing and higher levels of chronic conditions such as diabetes, arthritis, ulcers and anemia.

**Diminished Emotional Well-being** – Levels of psychological distress are significantly higher in dementia caregivers than in other types of caregivers and noncaregivers. Caregiver stress can result in serious psychological problems, including depression and anxiety that should be treated immediately.

**Increasing Social Isolation** – Caregivers often lack social contact and support and, as a result, experience feelings of social isolation. Caregivers tend to sacrifice their own leisure pursuits and hobbies, reduce time with friends and family and give up or reduce employment in order to devote time to their loved one.

**Growing Financial Challenges** – Costs associated with caring for a loved one with Alzheimer's disease are high. Direct costs include physician care, diagnostic tests, pharmaceuticals and personal nursing care. Indirect costs include loss of earnings by family caregivers as they relinquish or reduce employment and paid hours out of either choice or necessity.

Alzheimer's disease can take a major toll on you and your family as well as your loved one with the condition. As a caregiver, you can easily become overburdened and overwhelmed and find yourself at serious risk of physical and emotional "burnout." Therefore, it is important to take positive steps to safeguard your own health and, indirectly, the quality of care you are able to provide to your loved one. A comprehensive caregiver support plan should be created that includes partnerships with other family members, health professionals, key community resources (e.g. the Alzheimer's Association) and other available support tools such as online assistance and care-supporting technologies.

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