



## How You Can Cope When Caring for a Loved One with Alzheimer's Disease

If you are in the role of primary caregiver for a loved one with Alzheimer's disease, you may feel overwhelmed and beset with a wide array of emotions – sadness, anxiety, hopelessness and even anger are common. You can take heart in knowing that these feelings are considered normal and you are not alone. Today, more and more families are facing this situation as increasing numbers of older Americans are living longer than ever before. The good news is there are many things you can do to maintain your own well-being while also enabling you to provide better care and support for your loved one.

### Important Tips to Help You Cope

- **Manage your stress** – It is important to be aware of how stress affects your body and your emotions in order to avoid burn-out. Find ways to relax that work best for *you*, e.g. yoga, exercise, music, gardening or outings with friends and take the time for yourself. You deserve it and you also need it.
- **Ask for help and support** – No one can do it all! Frequently, friends and relatives want to help, but don't know how. Take them up on their offers, but be *specific* in asking for their assistance, e.g. pick up mom's prescriptions on Tuesday or take dad to get his haircut once a month.
- **Be realistic** – The care you give is valuable and *does* make a difference, but many of your loved one's behaviors simply can't be controlled. Decide what you can and cannot do and set priorities to take care of the most important things.
- **Expect and prepare for communication problems** – Be as clear and concise as possible in your communications and avoid noises and distractions to the greatest extent possible. Repeat things as needed and use the same words. Keep your communications as simple as possible and use actual names rather than pronouns such as "he" and "she."
- **Enjoy the good times together** – Familiar activities are generally enjoyable to those with Alzheimer's. For as long as your loved one is able, continue to socialize, travel, be physically active and participate in activities that are enjoyable to both of you.



- **Relive enjoyable memories** – Reminiscing is a recognized technique for assisting Alzheimer’s patients whose long-term memories are often intact. Discuss people and places that are familiar and create pleasant feelings for your loved one. Watch family videos, look at photographs or review trips and special moments from the past.
- **Give yourself credit** – Resist the urge to feel guilty. It's normal to lose patience or feel like your care may fall short sometimes. Remember, you’re only human and you're doing the best you can.
- **Give yourself a break** – It's perfectly normal to need a break from caregiving duties. No one can do it all by themselves. Look into respite care to allow some free time to take care of *yourself and your own needs*.
- **Be accepting of change** – Because Alzheimer’s is a progressive disease, your loved one will eventually need more care than you can provide. Take some time to research available memory care options now so you are prepared for the changes as they occur.

Recognizing and addressing the signs and symptoms of caregiver stress is very important. Take advantage of recommended coping mechanisms, and if you are experiencing anger, social withdrawal, anxiety, depression, exhaustion, sleeplessness, irritability or other serious health problems, you should speak with your family physician. Help is available in many forms, and you can take advantage of those resources to keep you at your best when caring for your loved one.