

Caring for the Caregiver

Anyone who has ever provided ongoing care for someone living with Alzheimer's disease or related dementia knows the daunting challenges that taking on such a role can bring. This responsibility can be a particularly heavy burden for those who play the role of a single caregiver; providing love, care and security to someone with memory challenges 24-hours a day, 7 days a week.

Many times, the care tasks can begin to take on a life of their own and can begin to overwhelm the caregiver if careful measures are not taken to ensure his or her emotional and physical well-being. Compromised immune systems, depression, untreated chronic illness, stress-related maladies, family conflicts, missed days of employment, and even death are not uncommon outcomes for familial care providers who do not take measures to care for themselves while caring for a loved one.

Thankfully, our campus can offer support not only for individuals with Alzheimer's disease and other forms of dementia, as well as for their caregivers. Caregiver support is offered in several ways at our campus, including:

- Monthly Family Forums – Held monthly, the Forum allows caregivers to gather, discuss and share issues and solutions. Family Forum meetings are open to all members of the community.
- Respite Care - Offered to seniors who would like to stay at the campus for consecutive days and nights, from one day up to 30 days. Respite Care allows the caregiver the opportunity to have some time for themselves to recharge or to take care of errands and tasks that they would otherwise not be able to complete due to the demands of caregiving.
- Caregiver's Day Off Program – A three-hour educational program designed for the home caregiver. Several knowledgeable speakers throughout the area present a variety of topics, in order to assist the Caregiver in understanding the stages of aging.

One of the most important things a caregiver can do is remember that it is a challenging task and that perfection is not necessary. Taking time for yourself to relax and rejuvenate to recommit yourself on providing care is just as important as creating positive moments for your loved one. Make a list of tasks you need assistance with so that others know specifically what you are having trouble managing.

To assist with the caregiving process, we offer the following suggestions:

- Begin planning for a loved one's care immediately when a diagnosis is given. Include community resources that will help with the efforts.
- Find a way to maintain regular exercise routines and to keep regular doctor's appointments. If needed, ask someone you trust to stay with your loved one while you are away.



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- Try not to skip meals, even if your loved one might not be interested in eating. Have a resource of small, healthy snacks for days when things are more challenging.
- Maintain pursuits that rejuvenate your spirit. This could mean actual worship such as prayer, or simply doing something that brings you back to center. If you have a preferred place of worship, do not isolate from it during this time. Also, remember that it is fine to accept help from fellow parishioners.
- Find ways to release the stress that often accumulates during caregiving. Try to find an oasis for yourself, even if it is your own bathtub two or three times a week! Utilize support groups to learn more about your loved one's condition and to remind yourself that you are not alone in your quest.
- Keep other family members informed of the realities of your situation. Encourage distant family members to come and assist periodically, or seek area day or respite services to provide you with regular breaks.
- Understand that your loved one will not be able to perform certain tasks as well as they used to. Try not to be upset or agitated if something is not done perfectly.
- Take it one day at a time and allow yourself time to grieve.
- Consider long-term care placement if things become too difficult to manage.

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