

Q: 90-year-old spouse taking care of 89 year old dementia wife. Feeling very lonely... very little conversation anymore. No initiation of communication. Only a few statements when there is one. Any suggestions?

A: Thanks for your question – changing relationships and communication loss are two are two sources of great sadness for caregivers of those with Alzheimer’s disease.

Here are a few ideas:

- Music powerfully touches us all through emotion and memory. Even though you can no longer have a meaningful conversation, you can enjoy listening to some favorite music together - try to recall your wife's favorite music or songs and pull out your old CDs, or listen to music through internet streaming services (or even music channels on your cable TV). This will add to your own happiness and allow your wife to hopefully enjoy the rhythm and sound.
- Regarding your sense of loneliness, which I am sure has been made worse since the onset of the pandemic, contact your local Alzheimer's Association to see if any online support groups are available. I'd also encourage you to use Zoom or other platforms to set up some regular "virtual" face time with friends and family.
- Even though your wife is not participating in conversation, I'm sure she still enjoys your presence. It's okay to sit near her and read, write letters, organize some things in your house or watch a favorite television show.

If you need some additional ideas, the Alzheimer's Association has a 24-hour help line at 800-272-3900. I'd also invite you to call your local Trilogy Senior Living Community (if you are living in your own home now) to ask the team there to share any ideas or resources. For example, it may be time to get some in-home help for both of you which can also provide you both with socialization, as well as chores. A move to a senior living community could also provide you with a safety net and a new group of friends.

Q: Any suggestions for an elderly caregiver? They live in a patio home on a Trilogy campus, not in Assisted Living. COVID-19 is making it especially difficult. We are hoping nothing happens to him since we could not take care of her.

A: Thanks for your question. Supporting people to live independently as long as it's safe and wise is a meaningful goal. Can your activity team create some regular "care packages" for your loved one relating to things to do at home, e.g. books of trivia, art supplies, or suggested exercise programs? Your chef could also provide some regular treats for them over and above any food plan. This could let them know that you're thinking about them.

If there are some in-home services available, I recommend in-home help 4 hours a day, every other day to start to give the caregiver a break and to help with everyday chores.

Finally, with dementia, I think it is always valuable to plan ahead. Invite the caregiver (and his or her adult children or POA, if available) to participate in a care planning session to make a list of options and local resources that could help. The person with dementia may eventually have to leave his or her caregiver for a supportive memory care neighborhood; if this is the case, you don't want to have to make decisions in an emergency.