

YOU CAN MAKE A DIFFERENCE



10 WAYS TO HELP AN ALZHEIMER FAMILY

alzheimer's 
association™

WHAT IS ALZHEIMER'S DISEASE?

Alzheimer's disease attacks the parts of the brain that control memory, thinking and judgment. A person with Alzheimer's may be physically healthy but require 24-hour-a-day assistance with basic daily activities. At some point, he'll forget the names and faces of family and friends. He may become withdrawn, and his behavior may change. Later, he'll decline physically as well.

ALZHEIMER'S AFFECTS THE ENTIRE FAMILY

Alzheimer's causes significant changes in family life. Spouses and children – often including school age youngsters – become caregivers. Caregiving can make recreation, chores and even employment difficult or impossible to maintain. The uninsured cost of care can wipe out savings, too. It's no wonder that 80 percent of Alzheimer caregivers report high levels of stress and stress-related illness.

FAMILIES NEED FRIENDS

In ten American families has a loved one with Alzheimer's disease, and one in three adults knows someone with the disease. Chances are, you do, too. You may want to offer your help, but worry that you'll say or do the wrong thing. You should know that:

Alzheimer caregivers

- *feel alone and disconnected from friends*
- *need assistance, but are reluctant to ask*
- *are often unable to do errands or complete household tasks*
- *experience stress, sometimes severe*
- *need a break from caregiving, but may not have anyone to relieve them or refuse assistance when it's offered*
- *are looking for someone to listen*

And those with Alzheimer's

- *face an uncertain future*
- *must adjust to new schedules and changing roles and responsibilities*
- *worry about overwhelming family caregivers*
- *strive to maintain an active and independent lifestyle*
- *may look the same, but act differently*

FRIEND TO FRIEND messages from caregivers

"We like to go out, but my husband's too much to handle alone. I could use some help."

"Call me. If I can't talk, I'll let you know."

"It's difficult when friends stay away."

friend is an important source of support for the Alzheimer family. Even if they live far away, there's still plenty you can do. Here are ten easy ways to help:

1 Keep in touch

Maintain contact with family members. A card, a call, or visit all mean a great deal. Family members, including the person with Alzheimer's, will benefit from your visits or calls. Continue to send cards, even if you don't get a response. It's a simple, yet important way to show you care.

2 Do little things – they mean a lot

When cooking, make extra portions and drop off a meal (in a freezable and disposable container). If you're on your way out to do an errand, check with a family member to see if there's anything they need. Surprise the caregiver with a special treat, such as a rented movie, an audiotope of last week's church service or a gift certificate for a massage or dinner out.

3 Give them a break

Everyone needs a little time for themselves. Offer to stay with the Alzheimer person so family members can run errands, attend a support group meeting or take a short trip. Even if the caregiver does not leave the house, this will provide some personal time. Chances are, the person with Alzheimer's will also enjoy a break.

4 Be specific when offering assistance

Most friends are good about saying they're available to "do anything," but many caregivers find it hard to ask for something specific. Have the family prepare a "to do" list of hard-to-get-to projects (e.g., laundry, dusting, yard work, medical bills). Figure out what you can do, then dedicate some time – on a weekly or monthly basis – to helping the family tackle some of these tasks.

5 Be alert

Learn about Alzheimer's and how it impacts the family. Most people with Alzheimer's "wander" at some point, and could become lost in their own neighborhoods. Know how to recognize a problem and respond. Take time to learn about other common behaviors and helpful care techniques.

6 Provide a change of scenery

Plan an activity that gets the whole family out of the house. Make a reservation at a restaurant and ask for a table with some privacy. Be sure to include the person with Alzheimer's, if the caregiver feels it's appropriate. If not, make arrangements for someone to stay at home while you're out. Or, invite the family to your house or to a nearby park for a picnic.

7 Learn to listen

Sometimes, those affected by Alzheimer's just need to talk with someone. Ask family members how they're doing and encourage them to share. Be available when the caregiver is free to talk without interruptions. You don't need to provide all the answers – just be a compassionate listener. Try not to question or judge, but rather, support and accept.

8 Care for the caregiver

Encourage caregivers to take care of themselves. Pass along useful information and offer to attend a support group meeting with them. Local chapters of the Alzheimer's Association have information available, and sponsor telephone "Helplines" and support groups in your area.

9 Remember *all* family members

The person with Alzheimer's will appreciate your visits, even if unable to show it. Talk with the person the way you'd want to be talked to. Spouses, adult children and even young grandchildren are all affected in different ways by a relative's Alzheimer's disease. Be attentive to their needs, too.

10 Get involved

Unless a prevention is found, 14 million Americans will have Alzheimer's disease in coming years. There are many things you can do to help families today, and prevent further devastation tomorrow. Make a contribution to the Alzheimer's Association or volunteer at your local chapter. Join in the Association's annual Memory Walk to raise awareness and funds for chapter programs and services. Ask your legislator to support funding of research and programs to help Alzheimer families. You can make a difference!