

Monthly newsletter for people caring for those affected with Alzheimer's disease or other forms of dementia.



California Central Coast Chapter

Santa Barbara County
1528 Chapala St. #204
Santa Barbara, CA 93101
Tel: 805.892.4259

120 E. Jones St. #113
Santa Maria, CA 93454
Tel: 805.636.6432

San Luis Obispo County
71 Zaca Ln Suite 110
San Luis Obispo, CA 93401

Ventura County
2580 E Main Street
Suite 201
Ventura, CA 93003
805.494.5200

24-Hour Helpline:
800.272.3900
alz.org/CaCentral

Caregiver Burnout

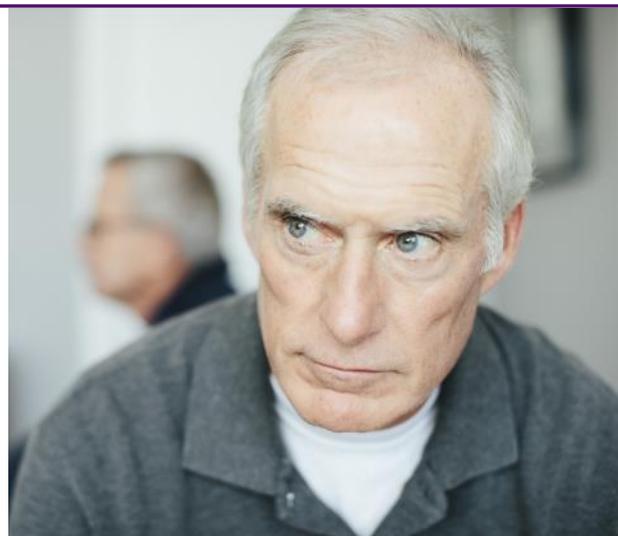
By Leila Thayer Malone

Caring for a loved one with dementia is a fulltime job and most family caregivers never receive professional training to prepare them for the role. As any caregiver will tell you, the work necessary to provide a happy, safe home to a person with dementia is incredibly difficult. It requires a lot of patience and skill. It also requires accepting a monumental shift in the caregiver's relationship with the person with dementia. All of this can—and often does—lead to heightened stress, depression, and ultimately burnout.

Burnout is a common and serious situation. Many nonprofessional caregivers will find themselves in this position at least once while caring for a person with dementia. The stress of providing daily care to a person who might be unable to express their gratitude can be overwhelming. But caregiver burnout can be harmful for both the caregiver and the person with dementia.

Caregivers who are caring for a loved one fulltime often experience feelings of guilt if they choose to take time for themselves. They often fear that asking another family member or friend to take over for a few hours or a few days will cause distress for the person with dementia. Caregivers also rarely want to share their burden with another loved one, so they forego asking for help when they are feeling overwhelmed.

The symptoms of stress can be extremely damaging. A caregiver experiencing burnout may skip their own medical appointments, leading to issues with their physical and mental health. They may start withdrawing from social activities, become more irritable, and lose valuable sleep because of their anxiety about their person wandering. As their caregiving



duties increase, they might experience extreme exhaustion that makes even the most simple tasks challenging. Worst of all, they might start feeling resentful and angry toward the person with dementia.

It is important that these signs of burnout do not go unnoticed. If you are a caregiver and have noticed these signs in yourself, or if you have noticed these in someone you know, reach out for help. You can start in small ways, like using some of the relaxation techniques discussed on the next page, or familiarizing yourself with community resources that are available.

Physical activity can also be a huge help to relieving stress and depression. Even ten minutes a day can make significant changes in how you feel. But don't force yourself to do something you don't enjoy. If you hate running, don't run! Go for a walk, dance along to a favorite song, go digging in your garden, or anything else you love doing.

If you're struggling with the grief of watching a loved one progress in this disease, consider joining [AlzConnected](#) or one of our [virtual Support Groups](#). In these spaces, you can talk to others who are facing similar challenges. You are not alone and we are here to help.

Continued on next page

Get moving!

Even during the COVID-19 pandemic, there are many ways to get some valuable physical activity with or without the person you're caring for.

Try out some of these fun activities:

- ⇒ Take a walk at a favorite public park, or around the neighborhood
- ⇒ Go window shopping in your local downtown district
- ⇒ Head to the beach with a sketch pad or a good book
- ⇒ Follow a seated exercise video on YouTube
- ⇒ Put on your favorite album and dance the night away at home
- ⇒ Start a project to improve your home or garden
- ⇒ Cook a gourmet meal
- ⇒ Get out your yoga mat and do some stretches
- ⇒ Invest in a stationary bike or other exercise equipment
- ⇒ Go for a quick run or walk around your neighborhood

Remember: It doesn't matter what you do, as long as you're moving!

Most importantly, prioritize taking time for yourself. You may initially feel guilty about leaving your loved one with a different caregiver or friend, but a burned-out caregiver cannot provide effective care to a person with dementia. Taking care of yourself is just as important as caring for your loved one.

If you or a caregiver you know are struggling to find ways to relieve their stress, contact your local Alzheimer's Association office. Staff members there can direct you to local resources, or provide a free Care Consultation to discuss your specific situation. Our trained Care Consultants will work with you to develop a care plan that works for you.

The California Central Coast Chapter also offers a Respite Care Grant. This grant is available to low-income residents of Ventura, Santa Barbara, and San Luis Obispo counties. It provides funds for families to use for temporary care so that the main caregiver can take a break, go to a medical appointment, or take a short vacation without compromising the safety of the person they care for. Contact your local office to learn more.



Relaxation Techniques

Practicing relaxation techniques is a simple, easy way to relieve stress. Not every technique will work for everyone, but once you find a method that works for you, it can be used everyday to give you a bit of peace.

- ◆ **Visualization:** Think of a calm, peaceful place. It can be the beach, a favorite vacation spot, a dinner in a beautiful location, or anywhere else that makes you happy. Mentally put yourself in that space and feel the calmness wash over you.
- ◆ **Meditation:** Dedicate as little as 15 minutes a day to letting go of your stressful thoughts. You can meditate on your own, or use guided meditation videos on YouTube to help you.
- ◆ **Breathing Exercises:** Slow down your breath by breathing in for six seconds, then out for six seconds. Do that twelve times and you'll feel your anxiety lessen.
- ◆ **Progressive Muscle Relaxation:** Tighten then relax each of your muscle groups, starting at one end of your body and working your way to the other end.