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## The Do's & Don'ts of Helping A Caregiver

By Marcy Maler, Program Manager

A parent, family member, or dear friend caring for someone with memory loss may feel as if he or she were adrift at sea in a leaky lifeboat; however, they are never truly on their own.

Today there are more than **16 million** Americans that provide unpaid care to people with Alzheimer's disease and other dementias. These caregivers provide an estimated **18.5 billion hours** of care, valued at nearly **\$234 billion**.

How can **you** be genuinely supportive to a parent, family member or friend as they care for their loved one? Let's start off with some thoughts that these caregivers would like you to know:

- *We need time to adjust to the diagnosis.*
- *We want to remain connected with others.*
- *We need time for ourselves.*
- *We appreciate small gestures.*

I often get approached by people with a common question: *It upsets me to see my mom wearing herself out while caring for my dad who has dementia. What should I do to help her?*

This is a complex question because not all "help" is actually helpful—at least not for your stressed and exhausted mother. Well-intended giving of what you think your mom may need—perhaps advice on new advances in research, phone numbers for additional services, or boxes of fancy cookies—may cause agitation, frustration and more stress. It is best to ask your mom what she actually needs.

Friendly conversations can easily feel critical to the caregiving parent. It is easy to think we have the answers to address the issues of caregiving when we are on

the outside looking in. It is typical to believe we see it so clearly and think *if only they would do **this** it would help.*



Let's face it, this type of advice is not helpful to the caregiver. When your parent feels that his autonomy is at risk, he will immediately be on the defensive. When conversing with mom and dad try not to "inform" them about what you recently learned, read, or heard, but rather ask them if they would like you to do some research on a specific topic. It is better to approach topics of concern from a place of admiration and encouragement instead of judgement or worry.

It is very concerning to notice that your sister is not as well-groomed as she used to be, and her house that was once spotless needs more than just a tidy up. It is alarming to see your brother's noticeable weight loss or his recognizable exhaustion. While you take in these observations do not offer your opinion. Instead reach out to offer help by identifying specific times, days, and tasks that you will be able to assist with. For example: *I have some free time on Wednesdays if you need help with appointments, grocery shopping, or other errands I could run for you, or if you prefer I can stay with Dad while you go.*

Be sensitive to personal boundaries and identify areas in which the caregiver will be comfortable in accepting help. Reassure her that it is a pleasure to help, not an inconvenience. It seems to work better to be specific on what you are going to do and when you are able to do it.

You can be sure that your friend who cares

## Tips & Tools

Most of us come home to a list of chores to get through before we can actually spend time with our family and friends or take up a hobby or sport. For a person caring for a loved one with dementia the demands can be enormous. Meal delivery services can help by easing at least some of the demands of running a home.

### Door Dash

Best local restaurants now deliver. Get breakfast, lunch, dinner and more delivered from your favorite restaurants right to your doorstep with one easy click.

### Uber Eats

Uber Eats has hundreds of restaurants to choose from. When you open the app, you can scroll through the feed for inspiration or search for a particular cuisine.

### Grub Hub

The best restaurants near you now deliver! Order online, or grab takeout, from national chains, local favorites, or new neighborhood restaurants.

### Healthy Warrior Meal Preparation

Healthy Warrior is a comprehensive organic meal plan, cooked and prepared by Mia Pasqualucci and delivered to your doorstep.

for his wife with dementia is frequently reminded that he needs to take better care of himself. Consider that it is most likely that he puts caregiving first and doesn't have much time to take care of himself. Think twice before you make "helpful" suggestions.

The last thing he needs is to feel criticized. Instead, offer to sit with his wife while he goes to the gym or to a doctor's appointment. Bring him a healthy home-cooked meal occasionally and sit and eat with him.

For your friend, **knowing that someone else** is going to take care of his wife for a while or assume responsibility for a task will lift a burden from his shoulders. Again, this is best accomplished when you identify specific times, days, and tasks that you will be able to assist.

It is important to appreciate that being a caregiver for a loved one with dementia adds many new responsibilities to the caregiver's role. The time, emotional, mental, and sometimes physical energy needed to maintain a household routine is extremely demanding for the caregiver. It is now one person instead of two handling the finances, shopping, cooking, cleaning, doing the laundry and yard work, fixing things around the house, keeping track of appointments and driving to them, taking care of personal hygiene for two people instead of just one . . . the list is endless and there aren't enough hours in the day. Then the caregiver is up several times each night, helping his loved one get to the bathroom or rummage through the fridge for a midnight snack. Disrupted nights after full days, exhaustion sets in! The caregiver needs support! Friends and family can create a community of care by sharing some of these tasks.

Caregivers know they need to take care of themselves. The intention is there, but more difficult to achieve when one is caring for someone with dementia. The

patient's needs will supersede the caregiver's, and those on the outside looking in, don't really understand that.



Whether you are seeking to support your parent, family member, or friend who cares for a loved one with dementia here are some helpful ways to lend a hand.

- **Join them for a support group:** talking to others who share the same experiences is extremely helpful
- **Help provide recreational or social opportunities** for both the caregiver and the patient
- **Errands:** food shopping, pick up/drop off prescriptions
- **Emotional support:** stay in touch, remember birthdays, learn what you can about dementia
- **Household chores:** change batteries, air filters, and replace light bulbs, help with holiday decorations, clean the fridge, help with the gardening
- **Provide respite:** volunteer to stay with mom a few hours regularly or perhaps for the caregiver to have a weekend getaway
- **Maintain the family routine:** keep pet food and water supplied and help the caregiver fill other family roles, such as carpools or babysitting grandchildren
- **Pampering:** plan a special time together, provide special health and beauty aids like nice lotions and candles
- **Spiritual support:** offer to set up a clergy visit, attend worship together
- **Just listen** and share time together