

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



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[alz.org/CaCentral](http://alz.org/CaCentral)

## Finding Support when You Need It Most

*By Jessica Mezzaposa, updated by Leila Thayer Malone*

Most people have never been to a support group, and many have never had a reason before to be a part of one. However, after a diagnosis, the thought of dealing with dementia alone and without direction can be frightening.

Persons with early-stage memory loss may want to connect with others who are on the same path, and caregivers often need to seek out information from others and share experiences. Both groups are seeking a refuge amid this sea of change; they are seeking a source of comfort, shelter, and relief. A support group can provide all this.

People experiencing early-stage memory loss often feel alone and isolated by the disease. They may believe no one in their family understands them or are frustrated with the hand they've been dealt. They too may want to be a part of a group where they can share their experiences, ideas, and emotions freely. It is this freedom that is found within a support group that is so beneficial to the attendee.

Family caregivers often have many questions. How do I stop Mom from driving? How do I get my wife a good diagnosis? When is it time to have full-time care? How do I keep from being resentful? How do I cope with the guilt, and how do I grieve?

Many of these questions can be answered by professionals in the field, but many of them may be better answered by someone who has already gone through a similar experience. In a support group, there is a special kind of compassion and understanding that extends from one caregiver to another. That validation of emotions and personal experience is what draws people to support groups. In a



support group, you are safe. You are where others understand and accept you, truly understanding your pain, fear, frustration, and joy.

In a support group, ideas are freely shared without judgment. Tips and tricks of the trade can make the difference between doing something the hard way or the easy way. Questions are posed and members chime in with strategies they have used or heard elsewhere. This brainstorming of information is not only practical, but can often help individuals change the

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## Caregiver Tips



**There are many ways that you can live a healthy and stable life as a dementia caregiver. Prioritize your own care by trying some of these tips:**

- ◇ Take care of yourself FIRST
- ◇ Get some exercise
- ◇ Make sure you are getting enough sleep
- ◇ Eat healthy snacks and meals
- ◇ Make time for an activity you enjoy, such as reading, listening to music, or going for a walk
- ◇ Keep up with your own medical check-ups and regular appointments
- ◇ Ask for help from family members, neighbors, community members, and friends
- ◇ Make a list of concrete tasks people can help you with
- ◇ Connect with local service agencies—such as the Alzheimer's Association and the Coast Caregiver Resource Center
- ◇ Join a Support Group

perception of their own situation. Seeing that there is another way, that they can try something else or a new technique, knowing that others have also gone through it, provides a sense of positivity and of control – both of which are feelings that are so often lacking for those dealing with progressive dementia.

The Alzheimer's Association offers support groups throughout our region for caregivers of people with memory loss and for individuals with early-stage dementia. We also have specialized groups for married couples, adult children caring for a parent, and other situations.

The purpose of these groups is to gather in a safe, supportive, caring, and understanding

environment to learn more about dementia and helpful resources. Attendees can share their caregiving experiences, wisdom and encouragement with one another and freely express thoughts and feelings they otherwise may not be able to share with anyone else.

The goal of these groups is to provide a structured setting – a refuge – for people to connect with others and to help each other navigate through the sea of dementia. Each group is facilitated by a trained volunteer, many of whom have cared for a loved one themselves.

For more information on the support groups that the Alzheimer's Association has to offer, please call (800) 272-3900 or visit our website at [www.alz.org/CaCentral](http://www.alz.org/CaCentral).

## Online Training for Dementia Caregivers

Being a caregiver doesn't come with an instruction manual, but there are resources available to help. Use the trainings, workshops, and books available on the Alzheimer's Association website to gain caregiving skills and practical advice. You can access the following programs 24/7 online. To find a schedule of our live online presentations, please visit our website at [alz.org/CACentralCoast](http://alz.org/CACentralCoast).

### ◆ 10 Warning Signs of Alzheimer's

*Learn about common warning signs of Alzheimer's and what symptoms to look for in yourself and others, as well as tips to approach someone who is experiencing changes in their memory, the benefit of early detection and diagnosis, and more.*

### ◆ Understanding Alzheimer's and Dementia

*Join us to learn about the impact of Alzheimer's, the difference between Alzheimer's and dementia, stages and risk factors, current research and treatments available for some symptoms, and Alzheimer's Association resources.*

### ◆ Dementia Conversations: Driving, Doctor Visits, Legal & Financial Planning

*When someone is showing signs of dementia, it's time to talk. This program provides tips for breaking the ice with your family so you can address some of the most common issues that are difficult to discuss.*

### ◆ Effective Communication Strategies

*As people with Alzheimer's disease and other dementias progress in their journey and the ability to use words is lost, families need new ways to connect. This program provides insights and tips to help.*

### ◆ Healthy Living for Your Brain & Body

*Join us to learn about research in diet and nutrition, exercise, cognitive activity and social engagement, and use hands-on tools to help you incorporate these recommendations into a plan for healthy aging.*

### ◆ Legal and Financial Planning for Alzheimer's Disease

*This is an interactive two-part program where you will have a chance to learn about important legal and financial issues to consider, how to put plans in place, and how to access legal and financial resources near you.*

### ◆ Understanding and Responding to Dementia-Related Behavior

*Join us to learn to decode behavioral messages, identify common behavior triggers, and learn strategies to help intervene with some of the most common behavioral challenges of Alzheimer's disease.*

Our Living with Alzheimer's Series explores the disease at each stage and includes information for people living with the disease:

### ◆ Living with Alzheimer's for People with Dementia

### ◆ Living with Alzheimer's: For Caregivers—Early Stage

### ◆ Living with Alzheimer's: For Caregivers—Middle Stage

### ◆ Living with Alzheimer's: For Caregivers—Late Stage

### ◆ Living with Alzheimer's: For Younger Onset Alzheimer's