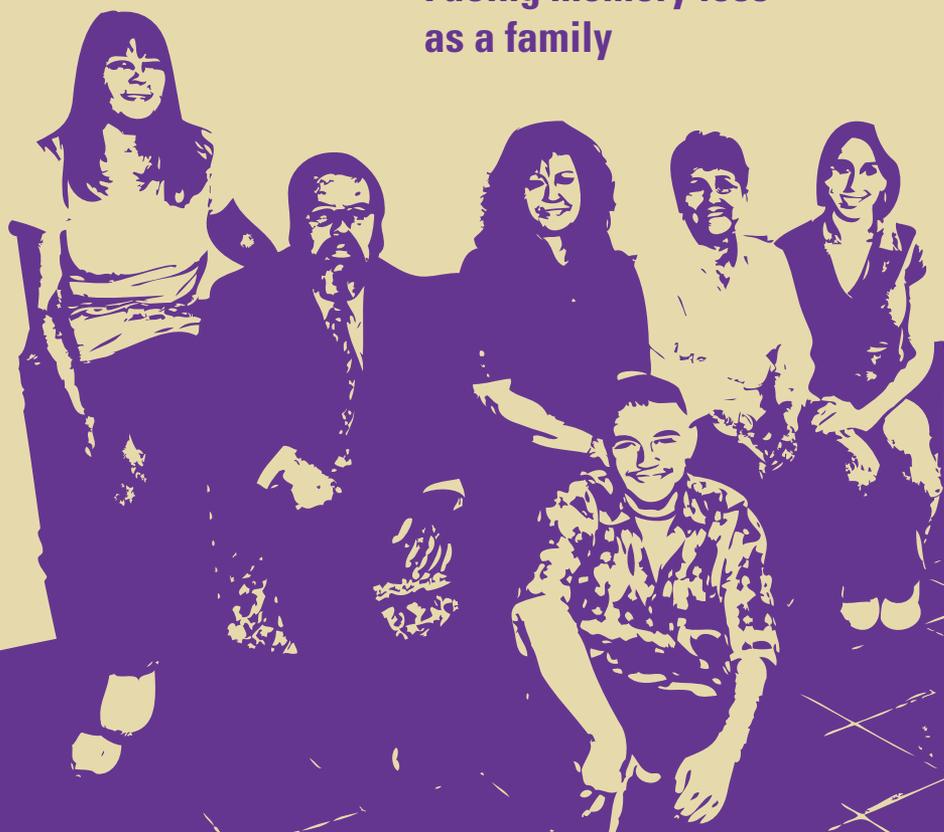


Together We Can!

Facing memory loss
as a family



alzheimer's  association®

What is dementia?

Dementia is a brain disease that causes problems with memory, thinking, communication and behavior. The disease gets worse over time and people lose their ability to take care of themselves. It can be difficult to take care of a person with dementia.

The caregiver and the family have great challenges to face.



Remember, caregivers who take care of themselves, give better care.

Taking better care of yourself can include the following:

- Find support. It can be a friend, counselor, or family member.
- Set aside time for yourself. Get plenty of rest.
- Learn about the disease.
- Learn about community services.
- Attend informal meetings about Alzheimer's disease and other dementias.
- Ask for your help whenever you need a break from caregiving or "you time."
- Set up a routine for taking care of the person with dementia.
- Inform family members that they can be helpful by helping care for the patient, buying adult diapers, clothing, etc.
- Talk to the doctor about any changes you see in the person you're taking care of.

Fotonovela Development Team: Stanford University School of Medicine: Dr. Dolores Gallagher-Thompson, Principal Investigator, Ms. Irene Rivera-Valverde, & Ms. Marian Tzuang; UC Davis: Dr. Ladson Hinton; The Fotonovela Production Company: www.fotonovelacompany.com - Ana C. Matiella & Dr. Ramón Valle. Funded by the National Alzheimer's Association - Grant # IIRG-08-92099.

We present the Jiménez family. A family dedicated to the care of their mother and grandmother, Doña Rosa Jiménez.



From left to right: Consuelo (daughter-in-law), Manuel (son), Delia (daughter) Doña Rosa (grandmother), Mercedes (grandaughter) José Manuel (grandson).

Who are you? Why are you looking at me that way?

I'm your granddaughter, Abuela. Don't you recognize me?

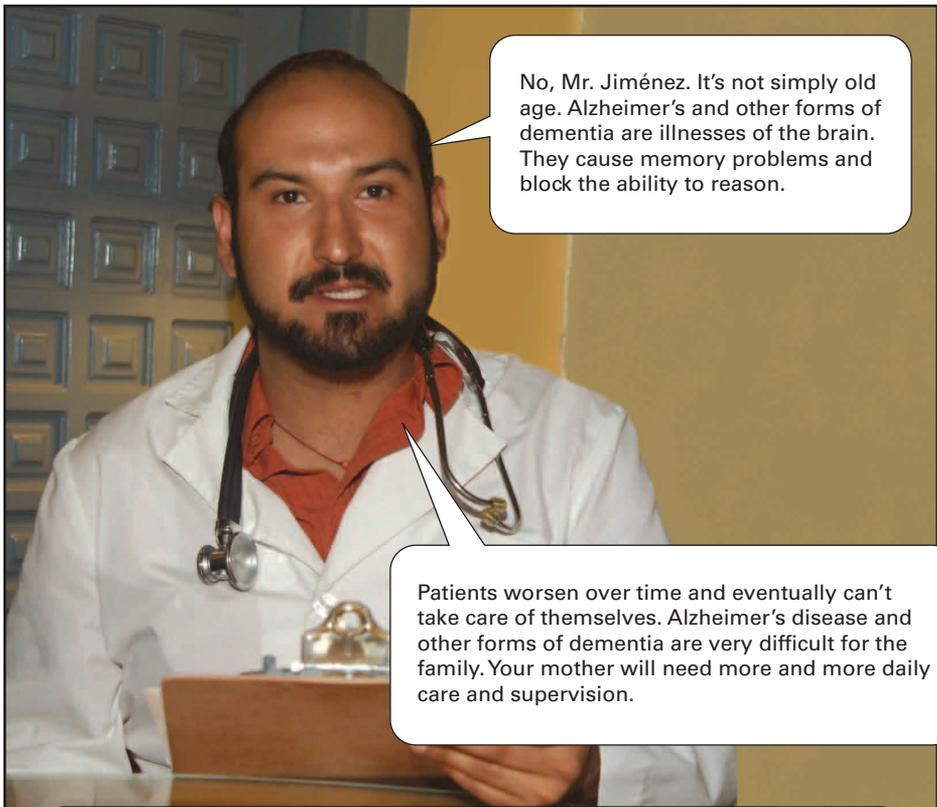
Oh dear God! She does not recognize her granddaughter. Something bad is happening. We need to see the doctor.

The family goes to Dr. Martinez for a diagnosis.

Mrs. Jimenez, judging from your symptoms and the exam, you have serious memory problems. In your case, it's Alzheimer's disease.

You mean it's not just old age?

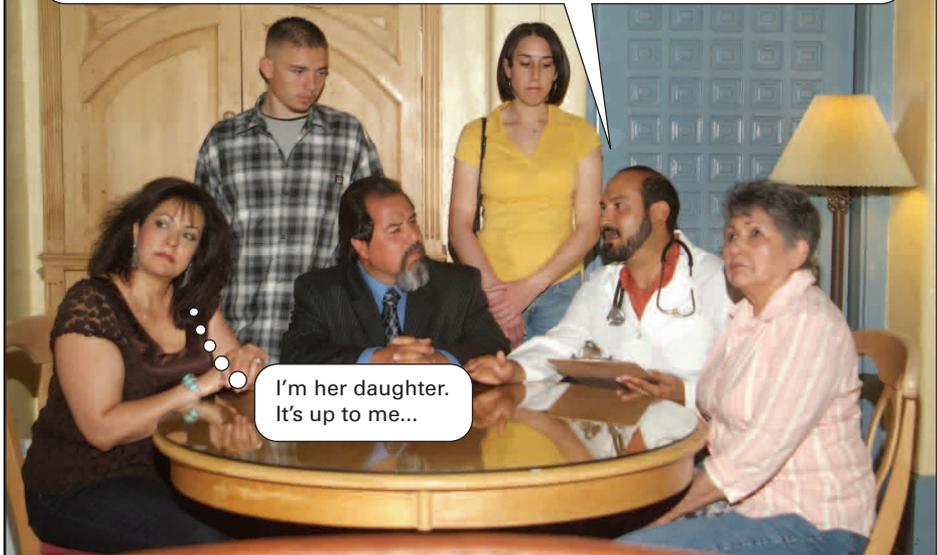




No, Mr. Jiménez. It's not simply old age. Alzheimer's and other forms of dementia are illnesses of the brain. They cause memory problems and block the ability to reason.

Patients worsen over time and eventually can't take care of themselves. Alzheimer's disease and other forms of dementia are very difficult for the family. Your mother will need more and more daily care and supervision.

I would like you to make an appointment with a social worker, Ms. María López. She can help you set up a care plan for Mrs. Jiménez. Any kind of dementia can be difficult for the family and you will need some help.



I'm her daughter.
It's up to me...

Well, Delia, I have to go out of town. Take care of her...

Socorro, Dr. Martínez says that mama has Alzheimer's disease.

I am out of here...

You remember that I took care of my aunt with dementia? I know how difficult this is.

Oh Delia, it breaks my heart to get this news! I know this is very difficult for you.

Oh Socorro, my poor mother!

I am so sorry. You can count on me!

Can you come over so we can talk? You always give me good advice.



Delia, I needed lots of help with my aunt. You're going to need help too.

Who's going to help me? Mercedes is in school and Manuel is always traveling for business.



Delia, Alzheimer's disease is very hard on the caregiver. In order to take care of your mother, you're going to have to take good care of yourself too.

Take care of myself? Look at me! I don't even have time to comb my hair!



Let me share some things that really helped me. First of all, set up a routine for every day care for your mother.



Give you mother her meals at the same time every day. Go out to the patio at a regular time. Routines help keep order and relieve stress.

Yes, I can see how order could make things easier for everyone.

Keeping a routine helps the person with Alzheimer's stay calm. It helps reduce the stress level at home.



I love mama so much Socorro, but at times she behaves so badly. I can't reason with her.

Delia my dear, I went through the same with my aunt. She would go outside and yell at the neighbors.



Yesterday mama did the same. She went out in her nightgown and insulted Mr. Valverde next door. I felt so embarrassed! Before this illness she was always so polite.

Delia, this is part of the disease. Your mother isn't doing this on purpose.



What can I do? I'm already feeling frustrated, trapped, and feel like I can't go on.

Yes, it is difficult! It helps to know your mother is not doing this on purpose.

A step toward better care is to change the way you look at the patient's behavior.



Something that helped me care for my aunt was to see myself as her nurse instead of her niece. I did this when she lost control.

Think of myself as her nurse? How can I do this? I'm her daughter!

Of course you're her daughter. But if you were her nurse you would understand that when she loses control, she doesn't know what she's doing.

Yes, that's it. If she becomes aggressive, or yells at you, try not to feel insulted. Act calmly and with patience.

I think I see what you're trying to tell me. I can keep loving her like her daughter, but not feel offended by her actions.

You're right! A good nurse does not feel insulted. Instead she acts with calmness and patience.

This isn't easy.

A few days later...

Delia, give me the dog's leash. I want to take him for a walk.

No it isn't. But you know, you can face the situation without tearing yourself apart.

We don't have a dog anymore. She can't go out by herself dressed like that, and with those rollers in her hair!



Delia, please let me talk to your mother. I want to distract her.



Doña Rosa, did I tell you that my cat had kittens?

Oh, how cute! Can I see them?



Yes, I'll bring one the next time I come over.

I love kittens so much!



Doña Rosa, would you like a cup of manzanilla tea?

Oh yes, please.



My mother always gives us chamomile tea before the dance.



So you like to dance?

I love to dance! Maybe I'll find a boy who will ask me to marry him!

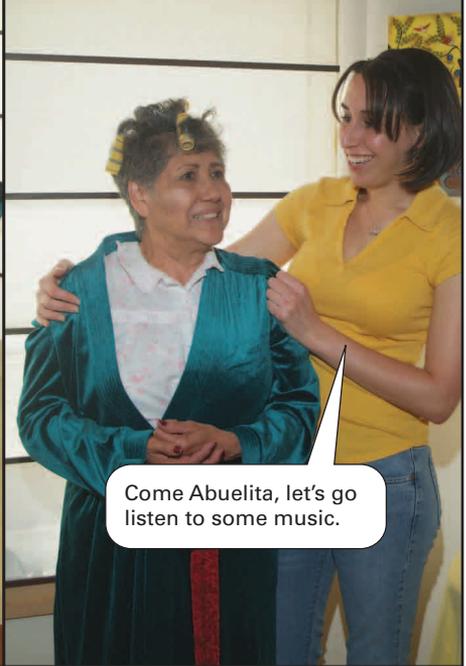
Socorro and Delia continue talking while Abuela believes she's still a young girl...

Mercedes invites Abuela out of the room so Delia can keep talking to Socorro.



Delia, do you know that the Day Care Center has dances for its participants once a week? Maybe your mother would like to go.

I'm not sure, Socorro. Mama doesn't like to be with people that she doesn't know.



Come Abuelita, let's go listen to some music.

They have trained persons at the center who take care of participants like your mother. This will also give you a little free time.



I don't think my brother Manuel would like to see mama going to a place like that.

Delia, just think about it. It might help.



I don't know what to do. There is so much to think about.

Remember that I had to feed my aunt, bathe her, change her diaper, everything!



Oh my God, Socorro, you mean she's going to get worse? I noticed how you distracted mama when she had the hallucination to walk the dog. Where did you learn to do this?

I learned this at the information meetings about Alzheimer's disease. If you go, you'll find people like yourself. They are learning how to care for their family members.



Socorro speaks about the third stage of Alzheimer's.



I just don't know Socorro. I'm not ready to talk to other people about my problems.

You don't have to talk if you don't want. You might learn from others who are in the same situation.



Two weeks later...

Oh dear! I have to stay calm and act fast. I have to distract her without scaring her.



Mama, please come with me. Mercedes wants to show you her new dress.



Mercedes, the intelligent girl she is, knows what she needs to do.

Abuelita, I bought a new dress for the dance? Do you want to see it?

Oh dear God! Mama could have burned the house down! We kept calm and distracted her. We're learning how to meet this challenge.



Delia has learned an important caregiver skill: to distract the patient.

You'll never guess what mama just did. I think she's getting worse.



But what can I do for you? You need to give her more attention.



Socorro, Manuel doesn't understand how difficult the situation with mama is. I need help. I'm going to call the social worker that Dr. Martínez recommended.



Good idea, Delia. Get some help.

You have to act right away. Put in safety precautions to avoid a terrible accident. You need to make sure your mother can't turn the stove on again.



Taking safety precautions in the home.



I need you to be here Manuel. I don't want to make all these decisions by myself. I need your help!



The day of the social worker's visit...



How lovely you look, Mama. There's a very nice woman coming to see us this evening. Manuel will be here too.

I'm so glad you're here! Mama is very anxious.



They were working on the road.

Upon entering his mother's bedroom, Manuel is in for a surprise...



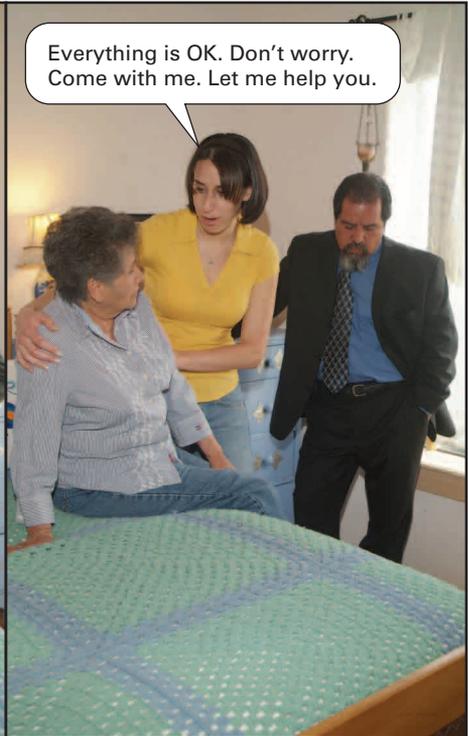
Help! A Thief! Help!

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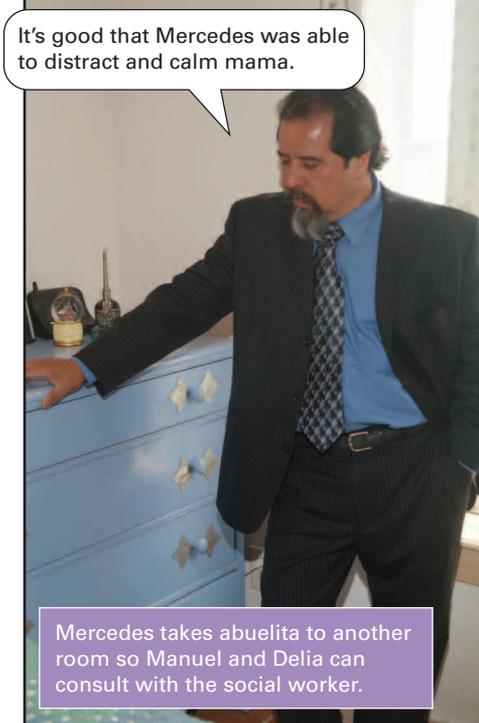


Mama, what are you saying. I'm your son, Manuel. Don't you know me?!

Delia, call the police!



Everything is OK. Don't worry. Come with me. Let me help you.



It's good that Mercedes was able to distract and calm mama.

Mercedes takes abuelita to another room so Manuel and Delia can consult with the social worker.



Please tell me about everything that has been happening.

Just a moment ago she thought I was a thief. She even tried to hit me with her purse. Isn't there some kind of medicine we could give her?

As the doctor predicted...mama is getting worse.

Your doctor can talk to you about appropriate medicines for Mrs. Jiménez. Let's talk about the best way for the family to take care of your mother.



I would recommend that you enroll Mrs. Jiménez in a day care center. This way she won't be bored or restless, during the day.



But she's not a child to go to a day care center.



No, Mr. Jiménez. These centers are especially dedicated to care for adults like your mother for part of the day.



And how much do these centers cost?

There may be programs to help with some costs. I can look into this. Why don't you visit a center and see what you think?



Mrs. Moreno, you have told me all that is happening to your mother, but you haven't told me about yourself. How are you doing?



The truth is Ms. López, I'm very tired. I have no energy and I'm very sad.

I understand. This is why I encourage you to look for services in the community. This is the time for the whole family to come together and each person do their part.



It is normal for you to feel tired and drained. You're doing very hard work. Sometimes caregivers get depressed. That's why it's important to get help.



Even though my daughter and my comadre help me a lot, I feel like I am carrying the world on my shoulders.

And you Mr. Jiménez, are you helping your sister?



Well, the truth is that I am very busy with my work.

Would it be possible for you to take your mother for an outing once a week? This gives your sister a break.

Something very important to keep in mind, Mrs. Moreno is that the caregiver who cares for herself, gives better care.

Certainly, once a week would not be inconvenient.

Thank you, Manuel. That would help me a lot.

Thank you so much Ms. Lopez. You have given us much to think about.

We've enrolled mama in the adult day care center and she really likes it. Today I went to the mall just to treat myself.

Two weeks later...

And how did it go for you at the Alzheimer's information group?

I'm very proud of you!

I met people in my same situation. I learned to look at things with different eyes. Mama has Alzheimer's disease and I am the person that has to take control.

But you know the most important thing I've learned? I've learned that the caregiver who cares for herself, gives better care!

Consuelo, mama will continue to decline until she is bedbound. We have to begin to help and share the responsibility among us.



Taking care of a person with dementia is not easy.

Caregivers may get depressed. If you think you might be going through depression, take a look at this checklist.

Check all that apply to you:

- I have been feeling down, blue, tearful and overwhelmed lately.
- I feel this almost every day.
- I have trouble sleeping. Sometimes I can't fall asleep. Other times I wake up and can't go back to sleep.
- I don't enjoy things the way I used to.
- I don't feel like eating.
- I feel so stressed, I am missing work and other things important to me.
- I feel lonely a lot of the time.
- It seems like I don't have happy feelings very much.
- I don't feel very good about the future.
- Sometimes I just want to give up and have someone else take care of my family member.

If you checked several of these, you may be suffering from depression. There is help for you. Take this list to your doctor and talk to him/her about your feelings. Ask for help.

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