

# ALZHEIMER'S DISEASE: THE ROLE OF THE CAREGIVER

[Home](#) > [Health Hub](#) > [Health Library](#) > [Alzheimer's Disease: The...](#)

Do you realize how much you do?

## Alzheimer's Disease: The Role Of The Caregiver

Challenges of caregiving for patients with Alzheimer's disease

Do you realize how much you do?



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- You help maintain the quality of life for your spouse, parent, family, or friend with Alzheimer's disease.
- You become educated about symptoms, treatments, and the progression of the disease.
- You help keep track of appointments with the doctor, medication schedules, and exercise.
- You offer the love and support necessary to meet the challenges of Alzheimer's disease.

You are a caregiver. While many patients retain their independence for a period of time after being diagnosed with Alzheimer's disease, some need more help with daily activities. Regardless of how long you've been dealing with Alzheimer's disease or to what degree, in some way your life and responsibilities have also been affected - physically, emotionally, or economically.

The role you have taken on is not an easy one. However, the following tips offer some guidance on how to maintain and improve your caregiving relationship:

- **Take time for yourself.** Make sure you have time to relax. If necessary, enlist the help of other family members or even hire someone to help out.
- **Learn as much as you can about your loved one's disease** so you will understand what changes to expect in your loved one's behavior or symptoms.
- **Help your loved one participate in as many activities in the home** and outside the home as much as possible. Maintain the intricate balance between helping your loved one accomplish a task and actually doing the task for him or her. Allow the patient the time needed to complete daily activities on his or her own.
- **Set realistic goals for yourself and your loved one.** Do not attempt to do everything. By setting attainable goals, you are setting everyone up for success, rather than disappointment.
- **Do not put your life on hold.** Continue to meet with friends, participate in hobbies or groups, and maintain a schedule as normally as possible.

- **Have someone you can talk to.** You are there for your loved one, to listen and to offer support, but you also need a support person. Talk openly and honestly with a friend or family member. If this is not possible, join a support group. Understanding that you are not alone and that someone else is in a similar situation helps you to feel nurtured.

The most effective caregiver is well-informed, prepared, and ASKS for help and support from all resources that are available.

### Challenges of caregiving for patients with Alzheimer's disease

There are some unique challenges that a patient with Alzheimer's disease confronts. First, the disease is quite variable. There may be times when the patient can function almost normally and then other times in which the patient may be very dependent. This is a natural part of the disease. Also, the patient's response to medications may fluctuate. There is a natural tendency for a caregiver to suspect that the patient might be unnecessarily demanding or manipulative. The caregiver may see the patient functioning normally but then assume that the patient should always be able to function normally.

Alzheimer's disease is a progressive disorder. While medications can provide some relief of symptoms, they do not stop the progression of the disease.

Depression is very much a part of Alzheimer's disease. Alzheimer's symptoms and disability can be made worse by depression, so it is important to recognize the signs and symptoms of depression and help your loved one seek treatment promptly.

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