



How to Recognize Caregiver Burnout & Offer Support

Nearly 60% of people with dementia live in their own home, 1 in 7 live alone. According to the Alzheimer's Association, caregivers provided 18.1 billion hours of unpaid care in 2015. This averaged nearly 22 hours per week with a total value of \$221.3 billion. Caregiving takes a physical, emotional, and financial toll on individuals resulting in increased health care costs, higher mortality risks, and personal sacrifice. Learn to recognize the signs of stress in caregivers and how to offer support with these tips.

Common Symptoms of Caregiver Burnout¹

- **Exhaustion:** Constantly feeling tired, even after they have slept; being unable or nearly unable to complete basic daily tasks
- **Change in sleeping and eating patterns:** Sleeping or eating significantly more or significantly less than they normally would
- **Anger or irritation:** Feeling like they have a short fuse; losing their temper at their loved one or others and being easily annoyed or frustrated
- **Anxiety:** Worrying about their ability to care for the person and a deep concern for what is going to happen in the future
- **Depression:** Feeling sad, empty, hopeless and crying at the drop of a hat; depression affects their ability to cope with even everyday challenges
- **Lack of concentration:** A sense that things are overwhelming and they can't focus on what needs to be done every day; they may find themselves forgetting appointments, for instance
- **Social withdrawal:** No longer getting together with other family or friends they previously enjoyed because it no longer interests them
- **Denial:** Unwillingness or inability to accept that their loved one has Alzheimer's, or that there is no cure; they may find themselves the only one in their family to believe the person is OK, despite evidence to the contrary
- **Health problems:** It is all too common for caregivers to experience their own health problems. [One study](#)² showed that people over 65 who felt caregiver strain from caring for a spouse with Alzheimer's had a 63 percent higher mortality risk than non-caregivers. If you can't remember the last time you felt good, it's time to see a health professional.

¹ Courtesy of Next Avenue, "[9 Warning Signs of Stress for Alzheimer's Caregivers.](#)" Find additional articles on Alzheimer's disease and caregiving at <http://www.nextavenue.org/alzheimers>.

² JAMA, "[Caregiving as a Risk Factor for Mortality: The Caregiver Health Effects Study.](#)"



Informal Ways to Offer Support

Small gestures are an easy way to show a caregiver that they're not alone. Consider doing the following:

- **Listen.** Offer caregivers the opportunity to talk in a safe and nonjudgmental space.
- **Meals.** Drop off a meal with instructions on reheating or give a gift certificate for a local restaurant or delivery service.
- **Playdates.** Does the caregiver have kids or pets? Offer to take them on an outing or overnight.
- **Odd jobs.** Pitch in and help mow, rake, or remove snow. Help hire a handyman to help with larger tasks.
- **Respite care.** Offer to provide temporary care so the caregiver can have a break – this can be beneficial for the caregiver and individual with Alzheimer's.
- **Kind words.** Show them they're not alone, send them a note or card. Little surprises like these can brighten a hard day.

Formal Resources for Support

- **Alzheimer's 24-hour helpline.** The Alzheimer's Association has social workers and other trained staff available 24 hours a day to help with questions about Alzheimer's disease and caregiving. The number to call is 800-272-3900.
- **The Alzheimer's Association website.** The Alzheimer's Association Caregiver Center offers a variety of resources to support caregivers, including its Alzheimer's Navigator® which helps caregivers develop personalized action plans to navigate the disease. Its Community Resource Finder directs caregivers to local resources. The Association also offers ALZConnected® that connects caregivers to share questions, experiences and tips via message boards and live chat rooms, visit Alz.org.
- **Dementia Friendly America.** Dementia Friendly America has developed an online Dementia Friends USA program to help individuals learn more about the lived experience of dementia to educate themselves about effective interaction and support of people living with dementia. Learn more by visiting dfamerica.org.

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For more information, visit www.pbs.org/EveryMinuteCounts.

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