

## Caring for the Caregiver: Caregiver Stress

Anyone who has ever provided ongoing care for someone living with Alzheimer's disease or related dementia knows the daunting challenges that taking on such a role can bring. This responsibility can be a particularly heavy burden for those who play the role of a single caregiver; providing love, care and security to someone with memory challenges 24-hours a day, 7 days a week.

The care tasks can begin to take on a life of their own and can begin to overwhelm the caregiver if careful measures are not taken to ensure his or her emotional and physical well-being. Compromised immune systems, depression, untreated chronic illness, stress-related maladies, family conflicts, missed days of employment, and even death are not uncommon outcomes for familial care providers who do not take measures to care for themselves while caring for a loved one.

To assist with the caregiving process, we offer several suggestions:

- Begin planning for a loved one's care immediately when a diagnosis is given. Include community resources that will help with the efforts.
- Find a way to maintain regular exercise routines and make and keep regular doctor's appointments. This may mean enlisting friends, church members, or companion services to come in to "sit" with your loved one for a few hours.
- Try not to skip meals, even if your loved one might not be interested in eating. Having a resource of small, healthy snacks may help to fill in on days when things are more challenging.
- Maintain spiritual pursuits. Studies indicate that caregivers who maintain former spiritual practices, even if it is just regular prayer or meditation, remain emotionally healthier than those who don't. Try not to isolate from a previous place of worship and accept help from fellow parishioners if it is offered.
- Find ways to release the stress that often accumulates during caregiving. Try to find an oasis for yourself, even if it's your own bathtub two or three times a week! Utilize support groups to learn more about your loved one's condition and to remind yourself that you are not alone in your quest.
- Keep other family members informed of the realities of your situation. Encourage distant family members to come and assist periodically. If there is no one to come, seek area day or respite services to provide you with regular breaks.
- Learn to lower your expectations of your loved one. Know that they will not be able to perform tasks at a previous level of proficiency. Learn to say "So what?" if things are done perfectly.
- Take one day at a time and allow yourself time to grieve.
- Consider long term care placement if things just get too difficult to manage.

For more information on caregiving resources or to attend a Memory Care support group in your area, contact your local Trilogy Health Campus.