



Living With Alzheimer's Disease...



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Vital Caregiver's Coping Strategies

When someone you love has Alzheimer's Disease, both your lives are affected. This article will help you find ways to cope with the challenges this disease presents.

Building a Caregiver Team

Caring for your loved one isn't something you should do alone.

Your most important support will come from family and friends. Help will also come from a team of dedicated healthcare professionals and support agencies. There is a wealth of resources available to you in the community. And it certainly can be confusing and even overwhelming at times knowing where to turn.

*Some helpful websites to visit **

- eldercare.gov
- Benefitscheckup.org
- govbenefits.org
- cms.hhs.gov (centers for Medicare and Medicaid)
- CNN Money.com
- Saveforcollege.com
- Finaid.com (latest news on financial aid)

Hire an Elder Lawyer who can help you with your legal and financial issue. Hopefully, discussions about legal and financial arrangements can be made during the early stage of the disease.

Alcoeur Gardens will be glad to assist you and point you in the right direction.

Caring for Yourself

It's normal to want to do as much as possible for your loved one. But it's vital to look after your own needs, too. Make time for sleep, exercise, proper nutrition, and socializing with friends. Know that it's okay to take regular breaks from caregiving. Accept help when it's offered. And be willing to ask for help when you need it. Doing that will help you feel refreshed and give you a break from your caregiving responsibility when you need one. Check yourself for signs of caregiver burnout, which can include irritability, anger, anxiety, depression, sleeping problems, or withdrawal from social activities. Look for support groups in your area or grief coaches whom can provide the emotional and educational support to help you cope. Lastly, if you are having difficulty coping, consider contacting a mental health professional with expertise in Alzheimer's and they can provide you with the training in the management of challenging behaviors.

Caring Day to Day

Your loved one's abilities can change from day to day. Plan activities and use a routine to avoid stress.

- **Activity and Exercise** – Regular activity is good for your loved one's

body and mind. Do things together such as go for a walk, garden or bake a cake.

- **Be active as often as possible.** This reduces restlessness and improves sleep.
- **Participate in social activities.** Take your loved one to see friends and family.
- **Eating Meals** – serve healthy foods with plenty of fluids and keep meals simple. Too many food choices can be confusing. Watch eating habits. Persons with Alzheimer's may eat too little or too much.
- **Taking Medication** – Be sure all prescribed medications are taken as directed and refill prescriptions before they run out.

Ways to Improve Communication

Your loved one may not understand you, and he or she may get upset by this. If your loved one becomes upset, stay calm. Speaking clearly in a relaxed tone of voice will put your loved one at ease. Try to redirect his or her attention to another activity. Use simple words and short sentences. Avoid phrases that can be interpreted literally, such as "break a leg" or "chew the fat", which might be confusing. Emphasize the most important word in your speech, either verbally or nonverbally (pointing). Try statements and not questions. Avoid arguing about reality. People with

Alzheimer's may not be able to separate past from present. Don't challenge them on this. It is best to just change the subject or "play along" in order to avoid added stress. It might take longer for your loved one to respond, so be patient and give them time. Make sure that your loved one is wearing a working hearing aid and/or clean glasses, if prescribed.

Despite all your best efforts, there will come a time when keeping your loved one at home is no longer feasible. Do not take this as failure on your part. Alzheimer's is a progressive disease that many healthcare professionals have dedicated years of education and training to. They also have the facilities, equipment and resources to care for Alzheimer's patients. In all likelihood, you have taken heroic measures to care for your loved one. Not wanting him or her to leave home is a natural and understandable feeling – as is wanting the best care for him or her. Making sure they are in a safe and secure in an environment that provides the proper routine and stimulation and medical care for an Alzheimer's patient is very important.

Next month's article will help you know to look for when choosing a new home for your loved one.

Alcoeur Gardens is the preferred alternative to standard institutional care for the memory impaired. We are a warm, intimate community located within residential communities. Alcoeur Gardens is a place where your loved one can enjoy entertainment, nature, friendly staff, good food and find personal peace. Alcoeur Gardens provides sensitive, carefully designed 24-hour care and supervision. Our beautiful interior and grounds create a comfortable and safe environment for your loved one -- like the home they have known all their life. We offer care like the care they gave you.



Denise Van Tassel. A graduate of the College of Staten Island, County University of New York, Van Tassel received her degree in Nursing. She continued on to New York Regents College where she completed her Bachelors Degree of Science with a major in Biology. Van Tassel is an RN, BS, Certified Assisted Living Administrator (CALA) and Licensed Nursing Home Administrator (LNHA). She is also President of Varis Health Consultants, an education company approved by the Department of Health and Senior Services to provide training for administrators in New Jersey. She is chief Operating Officer/Partner of Alcoeur Gardens, New Jersey's premiere Alzheimer's and Memory Impaired Living Community.

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