

## **Ways to help an Alzheimer's caregiver avoid burnout**

**Alzheimer's disease (AD), the most common form of dementia, involves gradual breakdown of nerve cells in the brain. Affected persons lose the ability to interpret information and to send messages to their body to behave in certain ways.**

Over time they experience mental, emotional, behavioural and physical changes, necessitating increasing amounts of supervision and, eventually, hands-on help with activities of daily living.

Family members, particularly wives and daughters, provide most – and in many cases all – of that care.

**These caregivers themselves are at increased risk for depression and other health problems due to the emotional strain and the physical toll of caregiving.**

Following are some things that you, as a friend or relative, can do to help prevent an Alzheimer's caregiver you know from wearing down:

**Keep in touch.** Recognize that you may have to make most of the effort in maintaining the relationship.

**Become informed.** Educate yourself about Alzheimer's disease to better understand the kinds of challenges caregivers can be faced with, and share the information with family and friends. Share findings with the caregiver as well – especially strategies for managing challenging behaviour.

**Lend an ear.** Listen non-judgmentally and demonstrate compassion. Don't give unsolicited advice.

**Connect her with other caregivers.** Locate caregiver support groups (contact the local Alzheimer Society chapter) and encourage her to try one. Offer to stay with her loved one while she attends meetings or, if concurrent care is provided, to accompany her to the first meeting.

**Promote self-care.** Encourage her to eat nutritiously, exercise and get sufficient rest in order to maintain good health. Do whatever you can to help make this happen. For example, bring over a meal, or offer to sit with her loved one while she goes for a walk or takes a nap to catch up on lost sleep. Also encourage her to get regular medical checkups. Offer to stay with her loved one while she attends appointments.

**Provide practical help.** Determine what kind of assistance she could use most; perhaps it's picking up groceries, running errands, or doing laundry or yard work. If she initially declines assistance, continue to express your desire to help. Meanwhile, take it upon

yourself to deliver a casserole or muffins or, if you're a neighbour, shovel her walk or mow her lawn when you do your own.

**Surprise her with a treat.** Ideas include a rented movie, a favourite magazine, fresh flowers or a plant, or a gift certificate to a restaurant that has delivery service. If you're on a limited income, sign out reading material, movies or CDs she would enjoy from the local library.

**Give her a break.** Offer to sit with her loved one for an hour while she goes out to a hair appointment or lunch with friends – or for a longer stretch, so she can attend a cultural or social event or take a day trip.

**Locate resources.** Offer to obtain information about community support services – such as accessible transportation, home care, adult day care and residential respite programs – if none are in place, and encourage their use as appropriate.

**Join the local chapter of the Alzheimer Society.** Your support will assist them in providing aid not only to your friend or relative, but also to other Alzheimer's caregivers like her. Typical chapter programs and services include a telephone hotline, support groups, a safe return program for wanderers, training for family and professional caregivers, a newsletter and a resource library. Membership also makes a thoughtful gift for the caregiver, connecting her to a key resource.

**Watch for signs of trouble.** Encourage her to seek help from her primary physician or a mental health worker if she feels overwhelmed or hopeless (possible signs of clinical depression), or if she starts to fear for her safety or that of her loved one.

**Stand by her.** Praise her efforts and be an ongoing source of encouragement. In particular, support her if she decides to pursue placement in a long-term care facility, doing whatever you can to help her and her loved one with the transition.

**Source and courtesy:**

[http://www.seniorsdaily.net/index.php?option=com\\_content&task=view&id=1029&Itemid=36](http://www.seniorsdaily.net/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=1029&Itemid=36)