Carers - Looking After Yourself

Caring for someone with dementia



Alzheimer National Helpline
1800 341 341

Caring for a person with dementia can become a very stressful and exhausting experience, although it must be emphasised that many carers report positive sides to being a carer.

It is all too easy to ignore your own needs when caring for someone with dementia and forget that you matter too. It is so important to take steps to look after your own health and well-being. By staying physically, mentally and emotionally healthy the risk of you experiencing anxiety, stress, exhaustion and depression will be less. You will be in a better position to support the person with dementia. It may also help you to have a better relationship with them.

It is important to remember that each person with dementia is a unique individual with their own experiences of life, their own needs, feelings and their own likes and dislikes. Just as each person with dementia progresses differently, the carers experience can also vary widely from person to person. What works today may not work tomorrow. We should try not to blame ourselves if things go wrong. Remember to reach out for help if you are feeling overwhelmed or don't know what to do.

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Your health and wellbeing

Some carers may experience high levels of stress, anxiety, exhaustion and depression. The following tips can help:

- Learn about dementia and the impact that the disease may have on a person. Understanding the illness can take away some of the uncertainties.
- By maintaining a healthy and balanced diet you will feel better. But remember to treat yourself sometimes with foods you enjoy.
- If you're experiencing disturbed sleep because your loved one is awake during the night seek advice from health care professionals. You can also read our factsheet on sleeping which provides information on sleep changes and suggests ways to try and manage sleep.
- Incorporating regular exercise into your daily routine is vital for your health and will give you more energy. Try to get a walk in the fresh air each day, do some exercises at home or gardening.
- Visit your GP for regular check-ups and pay attention to the signs and symptoms of excessive stress, low mood or anxiety. These kinds of feelings are easier to tackle at an early stage. Some GPs can do virtual appointments also if easier than in person.
- If the person with dementia's mobility is decreasing discuss with a health care professional to avoid causing an injury to you or them.

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Your emotional health

The experience of caring for a loved one is unique to everyone. Caring may not come naturally to everyone and that is ok. You may find that there are some aspects of caring you can manage easily, while others prove more difficult. This can change from day to day or week to week.

- While caring for your loved one with dementia, you may feel a range of emotions which can vary from day to day. One day you may be feeling sad, angry, resentful, frightened and alone. On the other hand you may find caring a very rewarding and fulfilling role. For most carers, it is both rewarding and stressful. It is important to recognise how you are feeling and to talk to someone such as a family member, friend or your GP.
- There will be days when you may become overwhelmed or it feels like everything you do is wrong. Sometimes there is no explanation for certain changes in behaviour that your loved one is experiencing. Be kind to yourself, take some deep breaths in a quiet place and try to take each day as it comes.
- You may experience feelings of guilt. The reasons can be varied but may include feelings of not coping, resentment, anger, loss and guilt for taking time for your own needs. These feelings can be difficult to deal with. It is important to reassure yourself that you are doing your best in a difficult situation and that you are supporting someone who needs you.
- Caring for a person with dementia can often seem to be a series of grief experiences as the disease progresses. You may observe your loved one has difficulties carrying out simple tasks, needing more support with day to day living or their memory loss becoming more obvious. The person with dementia may also experience changes in mood as they adapt to their changing abilities. These changes can bring up a range of emotions such as sadness, anger and confusion in both the carer and the person with dementia.
- If it seems as though these feelings are reaching crisis point, it is important for you to seek support from your GP, Dementia Advisor, Social Worker, Counsellor or other health care professionals, like a public health nurse, who can offer support as well as advice.

Get support

It can be helpful to familiarise yourself with services that are available in your area before you feel that need to access them.

- Involve other family members from the start so that the responsibility does not all rest on you. Even if they cannot offer day to-day care, they may be able to look after the person while you have a break or contribute financially to the cost of care.
- Always try to accept help from family, friends or neighbours when it is offered. If you say you can manage, they may not think to ask again.
- Talk to a family member or friend virtually, over the phone or by meeting for a cup of tea regularly. Discuss and talk about interests and topics you like to chat about rather than it all being about caring.
- Caring for a loved one with dementia can be isolating. It is important to build time into your daily and weekly routine to meet other people.
- Maintain hobbies and interests where possible and keep doing the things that interest you. It is important to maintain your personal identity as not only a carer but as the person you have always been.

Contact the Alzheimer National Helpline for free confidential help and support.

The Helpline is open Monday to Friday 10am to 5pm and Saturday 10am to 4pm.
Freephone **1800 341 341**. Email: **helpline@alzheimer.ie** Visit or live chat via **www.alzheimer.ie**

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- Information on services and supports in your local area are available on the Alzheimer Society website at www.alzheimer.ie. The secret to successful caring is to seek help before a crisis situation occurs. Know your own limits and don't feel guilty about asking for help.
- Support groups are available. It can be helpful talking to other people who are caring for a loved one with dementia. You will be able to talk and share openly about your feelings with other carers who understand what you are going through. For more information call the Alzheimer National Helpline on 1800 341 341 or visit www.alzheimer.ie
- The Alzheimer Society of Ireland provides a Family Carer Training programme. The programmes are designed to help family carers understand the disease and increase their confidence in their ability to care. For more information call the Alzheimer National Helpline on 1800 341 341 or visit www.alzheimer.ie
- For some, speaking to a professional counsellor face to face can help. You can speak to your doctor about this option. You can find out which counsellors operate in your area by contacting the Irish Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy, IACP on 01 230 35 36 or visiting https://iacp.ie/
- Family Carers Ireland offers free, one-to-one ccounselling by appointment and support groups to family carers. You can call on 1800 24 07 24 for more information.
- Caring for a loved one with dementia can present families with many challenges. It helps if families acknowledge their relationships will change as they respond to emerging needs and issues of the person with dementia. Families need to make every effort to avoid damage to their relationships due to differences of opinion and the pressure of providing care for a relative.

> *"Seek advice; look after your own health and wellbeing. There is no point in you yourself being a carer if you become causality."*

Time for yourself

It may be difficult to get time for yourself currently but where possible try to relax or to do something which is just for you. If the person with dementia cannot be left alone, see if family or friends can give you a break or whether services such as home care or respite care are available locally.

- Try to put aside a little time each day for yourself, if you can, to have a cup of tea and read the paper, to listen to some music or go for a short walk. Don't feel guilty about this. It is important for your well-being.
- Having a routine can be a great help to have a sense of how your day and week is going to go. You can use a weekly planner for your loved one by including reminders, things that are important to them; daily activities and long term memories as well as setting time aside to do something for yourself. It also allows your family, friends and the health care professionals working with you to plan, how and when they can support you both.
- Try to get out every week or so to meet a friend or pursue a hobby, or do something else that you find enjoyable and which keeps you in contact with the outside world.
- See if you can have a break for a weekend or a week or so on a regular basis to recharge your batteries.
- It is important to remember you are only one person and there is a limit on how much you can do.
- Family Carers Ireland have a free online course for family carers called "Self-care for Family carers". It provides information and advice on how to care for yourself when you are caring for someone else. **https://www.familycarers.ie/carers-supports/learning-education/elearning-courses/**

> "You can't be a carer 24/7; you can't be at the top of your game if you don't get time for yourself"

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Useful contacts

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Email: **helpline@alzheimer.ie**
Visit / Live Chat **www.alzheimer.ie**

The Dementia Carers Campaign Network is hosted by the Alzheimer Society of Ireland. The group is made up of people who have experience caring for a loved one with dementia. The group aims to be a voice of and for dementia carers in Ireland and to raise awareness of issues affecting families living with dementia.

To find out more contact the Alzheimer National Helpline at **1800 341 341** or visit **www.alzheimer.ie**

Community Support
There are organisations who can provide support with small repairs in the home, transport or delivery of meals:

Age Action Care and Repair
Call **01 475 6989**
Visit
https://www.ageaction.ie/get-help/care-and-repair/

Alone
Call **0818 222 024**
Visit **https://alone.ie/our-work/#Coordinated-Support**

Age Friendly
Call **046 903 2170**
Visit **https://agefriendlyireland.ie/about-us/what-we-do/**

Friends of the Elderly
Call **01 873 1855**
Visit **https://friendsoftheelderly.ie/**

Vantastic
Call **1800 242 703**
Visit **https://vantastic.ie/**

Family Carers Ireland
For services such as training for carers; counselling, support groups, home care services and information.

Call **1800 24 07 24**
Visit **www.familycarers.ie**

The Health Service Executive (HSE)
To find out where your local HSE Health Centre is or to ask about services that may be available in your area;

Freephone: **1800 700 700**
Phone: **01 240 8787**
Phone (from outside Ireland): **00 353 1 240 8787**

Irish Association for Counselling & Psychotherapy
To find a counsellor or psychotherapist in your area

Call: **01 230 35 36**
Website: **www.iacp.ie**

Samaritans
Offer a safe place for you to talk any time you like, in your own way – about whatever is going on.

Call: **116 123**
Lines are open 24 hours a day, 365 days a year.

SeniorLine
SeniorLine is a confidential listening service for older people provided by trained older volunteers.

Call **1800 80 45 91**
Lines are open every day 10am to 10pm
Website: **www.thirdageireland.ie//seniorline**

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The Alzheimer Society of Ireland (ASI) has taken great care to ensure the accuracy of the information contained in this factsheet. ASI is not liable for any inaccuracies, errors, omissions or misleading information.

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