

Being a Healthy Caregiver

From Alzheimer's Association's website:

www.alz.org

(Note: These healthy tips apply to all caregivers.)

As a caregiver, you may find yourself with so many responsibilities that you neglect taking good care of yourself. But the best thing you can do for the person you are caring for is stay physically and emotionally strong. Here's how:

- See the doctor
- Get moving
- Eat well
- Tips to help you cope

See the Doctor

Be sure to visit your physician regularly (at least annually), and listen to what your body is telling you. Any exhaustion, stress, sleeplessness, or changes in appetite or behavior should be taken seriously. Ignoring these symptoms can cause your physical and mental health to decline. If you are caring for someone in the late-stages of Alzheimer's, talk to your health care provider about the seasonal flu shot. Being vaccinated protects both you and the person you are caring for.

Get Moving

No doubt you know that exercise is an important part of staying healthy—it can help relieve stress, prevent disease and make you feel good. But finding the time to exercise is another story.

Use these tips:

- **Take friends and family members up on their offers to help.**
You can get in a good workout in a short amount of time – even a 30 minute break.
- **Start small.**
While it is recommended that you get 30 minutes of physical activity at least five days a week, even 10 minutes a day can help. Fit in what you can, and work toward a goal.
- **Exercise at home.**
When the person with dementia naps, pull out a yoga mat and stretch, set up a stationary bike, or try exercise tapes.
- **Find something you love.**

If you enjoy the activity, it will be easier to make it a habit.

There also are many ways you can be active with the person with dementia. Here are a few ideas:

- Take a walk together outside to enjoy the fresh air
- Go to the mall and take a stroll indoors
- Do seated exercises at home
- Dance together to favorite music
- Garden or do other routine activities that you both enjoy

Eat Well

Heart-healthy eating patterns, such as the Mediterranean diet, are good for overall health and may help protect the brain. A Mediterranean diet includes relatively little red meat and emphasizes whole grains, fruits, vegetables, fish, nuts, olive oil and other healthy fats. Try new recipes and involve the person with dementia.

Five tips to help you cope

- **Manage your level of stress.**
Stress can cause physical problems (blurred Vision, stomach irritation, high blood pressure) and changes in behavior (irritability, lack of concentration, change in appetite). Note your symptoms and discuss with a doctor, as needed. Try to find relaxation techniques that work for you.
- **Be realistic.**
The care you give does make a difference, but many behaviors can't be controlled. Grieve the losses, focus on positive times as they arise, and enjoy good memories.
- **Know you're doing your best.**
Remember that the care you provide makes a difference and that you are doing the best you can. You may feel guilty because you can't do more, but individual care needs change as Alzheimer's progresses. You can't promise how care will be delivered, but you can make sure that the person with the disease is well cared for and safe. For support and encouragement, join a support group.

Being a Healthy Caregiver (Continued)

(See end of article for date and time of the Friendship Center's Caregivers' Support Group).

- **Take a break**

It's normal to need a break from caregiving duties. No one can do it all by themselves. Allow time to take care of yourself. The **Friendship Center** offers adult day care services Monday—Friday from 8:00 am—4:00 pm. For more information, please contact us at **815-369-2690**.

When longer or overnight care is needed, respite care is offered by many area long-term care facilities.

- Accept changes as they occur.

People with Alzheimer's disease change over time and so do their needs. They may require care beyond what you can provide on your own. Becoming aware of community resources and care options – from home care services, adult day care services to residential care – can make the transition easier. So will the support and assistance of those around you.

Caregiving can be overwhelming, but you aren't alone. We would love to have you join us at our **Caregivers' Support Group**. Our next meeting is on **April 11, 2018 at 1:00 pm at St. John's Lutheran Church**. (We meet the 2nd Wednesday of every month.) For more details, contact the **Friendship Center at 815-369-2690**.