

Don't Do It Alone

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Supporting a person with dementia is demanding and stressful, even if you are young and in good health, it requires a lot of time and energy. It is essential to be realistic about how the disease will affect you and your loved ones over time and adjust expectations accordingly. For this reason building a good circle of support is key to maintaining quality of life.

The first step is to be open about the diagnosis with family and friends. Educating yourself and the people in your life will prepare you for the journey ahead. Sharing information with others will enable them to be more accommodating and supportive. Often family and friends may want to help, but do not know how. You may find it useful to make a list of things that you could use assistance with, and based on the strengths, availability and interests of those around you, ask people for help with specific tasks that are best suited to them. Your circle of support will operate much more effectively if helpers have a clear understanding of what you are asking of them, what type frequency it will involve, and the time commitment required. This will enable them to plan the activity into their schedule accordingly and make it as convenient for them as possible.

It is also important to learn about the community supports that are available to you. Not everyone has family and friends nearby that are able to help out, but even if you do, it is good to utilize a mix of informal support and professional/community services to balance out the caregiving load. There are service agencies in most communities that assist with practical issues such as transportation, household or caregiving tasks. Your local Alzheimer Society can help direct you to the services available in your community.

Connecting with other people can help to alleviate isolation and feelings of loneliness. Joining social clubs or interest groups can provide a break from the "every day" and the opportunity to expand your support network. For example, for caregivers, attending a fitness class or book club meeting offers the chance to meet new people, focus on something other than caregiving duties, and recharge patience! For people with dementia, attending an Adult Day Program can provide a safe environment to socialize and participate in mentally stimulating activities.

Support groups are also a wonderful way to meet people that are experiencing similar circumstances. The Alzheimer Society has many support groups for caregivers as well as people with dementia. Participating in a support group allows you to learn strategies from others that are struggling with the same challenges and recognize that your feelings are shared by others.

Alzheimer Society

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Not a group person? – The Alzheimer Society also offers individual support to help better understand the management of dementia, navigation of the health care system, and planning for the future. There are also many online resources and support networks such as the Alzheimer Society of Canada's Caregiver Forum.

Asking for help is not always easy. Many people value their independence and feel that asking for help is a sign of weakness. It is important to realize that caring for a person with dementia involves a set of challenges that are best not tackled alone.

A little boy was having difficulty lifting a heavy stone.

His father came along just then.

Noting the boy's failure, he asked, "Are you using all your strength?"

"Yes, I am," the little boy said impatiently.

"No, you are not," the father answered.

"I am right here just waiting, and you haven't asked me to help you."

Author unknown.

Sources:

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