

# *Caring for the* **Caregiver**



**DEMENTIA  
ALLIANCE**

of North Carolina

A STATE OF CARING



## Trusted dementia navigation

**A**t **Dementia Alliance of North Carolina (DA-NC)**, our primary focus is improving the lives of caregivers who, more often than not, have no prior experience and no other alternative when assuming their roles as caregivers.

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*Our goal is to provide individualized **Comfort**, timely **Assistance**, relevant **Resources** and the latest in dementia **Education** to communities across North Carolina.*

*Count on our expert staff to walk with you and your family as trusted guides on this journey.*

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Compared with caregivers of people without dementia, **twice as many** dementia caregivers experience long-term stress from the financial, emotional, and physical difficulties of caregiving. Stress, if left unmanaged, can impact their physical health (reduced immune function, slow wound healing, increased incidence of hypertension and coronary heart disease).

## Caregiver burnout is REAL.

**B**urnout is caused by long-term stress and occurs when you feel overwhelmed by the constant demands of caring for your loved one. If you're feeling stressed out in your caregiving role, **you're not alone**. Caregivers seldom take time to address their own needs.

### *Signs of caregiver burnout:*

- Excessive use of alcohol, medications or sleeping pills
- Appetite changes — eating too much or too little
- Depression, hopelessness, feelings of alienation
- Losing control physically or emotionally
- Neglect or rough treatment of the person for whom you're caring
- Trouble falling or staying asleep
- Difficulty concentrating
- Missing appointments

How well you take care of yourself can have a huge impact not only on your own well-being, but on the person you most care about.

Caregiving for individuals with dementia, including Alzheimer's disease, is a rapidly growing sector of our older population:

- In North Carolina alone, an estimated **473,000** dementia caregivers are providing more than **538,000 hours** of unpaid care each year.
- Dementia caregivers have an estimated **\$375 million** in higher health care costs.
- The physical and emotional impact of dementia caregiving is estimated to have resulted in more than **\$10.2 billion** in health care costs in the U.S.

### *Resources:*

*NC County Health Data Book, 2020, Division of Public Health, NC Dept. Health and Human Services, State Center for Health Statistics*

*2019 Alzheimer's Disease Facts and Figures; Alzheimer's Association*

[https://www.who.int/mental\\_health/neurology/dementia/dementia\\_the-maticbrief\\_epidemiology.pdf](https://www.who.int/mental_health/neurology/dementia/dementia_the-maticbrief_epidemiology.pdf)

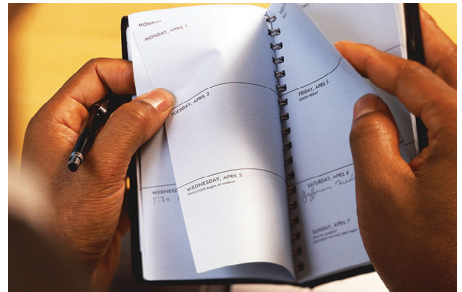


## Take care of you

**T**he good news is that burnout is preventable and reversible. If you recognized any of the warning signs, consider taking the steps below to get your life back into balance.

**1. Shift your focus:** By allowing time to focus on you, you're more apt to recognize early signs of chronic stress and caregiver burnout. Many people don't realize how gradually stress and burnout can add up. Becoming proactive and preventing burnout is better than needing to recover from it later.

**2. Set aside “you” time:** Even if you feel you don't ‘need it,’ take time doing something you love.



Add it to your calendar, like anything else as a reminder that you are committed to that “you” time. And stick to it.

**3. Look for local support:** Caregiver support programs are available through DA-NC. Simply hearing other caregiver experiences will help you feel less alone and “normalize” common feelings of helplessness, sadness, burnout and

frustration. When people offer to help, accept their offers and suggest specific things that they can do to help. If you feel depressed or anxious, consult your doctor for a referral to a mental health professional in your region

#### 4. Exercise and relaxation:

Numerous studies have shown that moderate daily exercise, like walking and dancing can have a positive effect on stress. Likewise, relaxing activities can decrease stress; deep breathing used in yoga and meditation can reduce your heart rate and calm anxiety. Take a class and find your zen.



#### 5. Rejuvenate and recharge:

Some people find that being in nature and engaging in outdoor activities very rejuvenating; consider stimulating your senses by visiting a museum, listening to music or attending a concert; participate in art or cooking classes; treat yourself to a massage or other pampering, feel-good experiences. **Think about what works best for you!**

*(more on page 6)*



## Furry friends

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### Ask about Music & Memory at Home, a personalized music program offered by DA-NC:

- **Improved relationships:** provides increased engagement, joy and connection to past memories.
  - **Improved caregiver roles:** increases free time for caregiver when participants are listening to their personal play list.
  - **Improved quality of life:** increased energy levels and activity, lift in mood, and reduced anxiety.
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**6. Spend time with pets:** Animals love unconditionally and have been shown to offer health benefits to humans; studies from the National Institute of Health have found that pet ownership can actually improve cardiovascular health. Spend more time with your pet; take longer walks with your dog or add more playtime for your cat.

**7. Start socializing more:** Caregivers spend so much time caring for loved ones that they often neglect to maintain friendships. Avoid narrowing your world to the point where all you do is work and provide care. Develop a personal support network that includes people who build you up and listen to your concerns without judgment.

## Say Goodbye To Guilt

**A**cknowledge your feelings. It's important to understand that feelings of anger and resentment are common among caregivers. If these feelings begin to impact your relationships, seek assistance to **manage them in constructive, healthy ways.**

### **Think quality, not quantity.**

If you're feeling guilty that you aren't spending enough time with your loved ones, focus on how you can **improve the quality of your time together.** Listening to your mothers' Music & Memory playlist or challenging dad to a board game, may mean more to them than cleaning their kitchen or delivering a pot roast.

**Establish priorities.** While no one has the time or energy to do everything for everybody, you must find time (and energy) to do the things that are most important to you. By establishing priorities - and allowing some flexibility for the unexpected - you can help ensure that the most important needs and tasks are met.

**Set limits.** If your loved ones' constant demands are running you ragged, decide - and clearly acknowledge - what you're able and willing to do for them. By setting limits and standing behind them, you can help reduce the guilt trips that come when you can't meet their every demand.

*(more on page 8)*



*Quality time*

### **Redefine your concept of caring.**

If you find it difficult providing 'hands-on' care for your parent, don't feel guilty - simply think of other tangible ways you can help. Perhaps you're more comfortable paying for an outside caregiver or planting flowers your loved one enjoys. We all 'give care' differently - add value where you can make a difference.

**Act from love, not from a sense of debt.** If you think of caring for an aging loved one as repayment for all they did for you, you will always end up in the red. Instead, think of caregiving as one person helping another out of love.

### **Foster their independence.**

Don't feel guilty for not doing things that your loved one could do for themselves. Instead, look for ways to help them do what they can. Providing a \$1.29 pill dispenser can help your parent become more independent - and free up precious time for you.

### **Don't succumb to peer pressure.**

Acknowledge, but don't be overly influenced by advice you get from friends, family and coworkers. Do what your heart tells you is best and what your circumstances permit.

**Face the facts.** Despite how much you want to help, a time will come when your loved one will need round-the-clock care and constant supervision that you can't provide. When that happens, acknowledge that someone (or someplace) may be better equipped to provide the majority of that care than you are.

**Find a new normal.** Grieve for your losses then allow yourself to dream new dreams. Forgive yourself and others when things don't work out as originally planned. Concentrate on one day at a time.

*Source: Alexis Abramson, Ph.D.*

## **Let our dementia navigator guide your family's journey**

For more than 40 years, **Dementia Alliance of North Carolina** has provided educational programs and support services for families across the state, and has funded dementia research at our state universities and institutions. Call or visit us today at:



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**[www.dementianc.org](http://www.dementianc.org)**