

How to take care of the Alzheimer's caregiver

by Kathleen Spring

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Caring for a person with Alzheimer's disease can become all-consuming and result in the Caregiver's health deteriorating. The Caregiver should create a **two-step plan** to take care of themselves. The first step is planning a daily break, and the second step is planning a monthly get away.

==Step 1, the Daily Plan

Many caregivers say that they never seem to have a relaxing "down moment" in their day. They often feel that taking their mind off of what the Alzheimer's person is doing could result in disaster. But if the Caregiver is constantly exhausted or stressed, it may result in their ill health or an injury. The Caregiver should plan to take at least one break a day. The first thing is to figure out when the ill person has quiet time. It might be when they normally take a nap, or have a regular task that distracts them, such as a puzzle or TV show.

In step 1, the Caregiver should make a list of some of their favorite things to do, which they may have been neglecting. Remember, these are activities for the Caregiver. Items like organizing medical records do not belong on this list.

(1.) Home Activities (5 to 60 minutes)

Spend quality time playing or petting a pet.

Get in touch with a friend, either inviting them over, or on the phone.

Read a spiritual book, such as the Bible.

Bake something easy and unusual.

Go out in your yard and sit quietly.

Read a book.

Write in a journal.

Make a craft item.

Meditate.

These items will distract the Caregiver from their stress, and help clear their mind and re-energize them for the rest of the day.

==Step 2, Outside Activities (1/2 day)

This list will provide incentive for the Caregiver to look for outside help, so that they can regain a bit of their normal life again.

(2.) Out of the House Activities

Get a massage.

Go to church or a church activity.

Get a beauty treatment or hair cut.

Go shopping for a small special item for yourself.

See a movie.

Have a quiet meal out, or with a friend.

Visit a friend and do an activity with them, such as crafts.
Go out for a “Sunday drive” to no particular destination.
See grandchildren or other special relatives.

Getting Help in Finding a Substitute Caregiver:

In order to take advantage of list #2, the Caregiver has to find help in watching the Person. There are plentiful places to find free help, as well as paid help. This is not necessarily dependent on a person’s income level, or upon relatives. Remember, a Person can be helped either by being given some free time to do their own thing in the house or away; or they can get people to come in and help them do things like raking leaves outside, picking up the mail, and more.

1. Governmental help

Most cities, and all counties have at least one person, and often entire departments devoted to Aging Services or Health Services. This can be found by calling your local government offices or looking up their web site. They can either connect you with a volunteer once a week, or once a month, or let you know where to go to get this service. Most of these organizations put on an annual Caregiver Day. Local businesses donate samples or information. Many senior services set up booths offering tips for either the Caregiver’s health or aid in caring for the Person. Lunch is usually included.

2. Neighborhood

If you don’t ask, you don’t receive. Who always has a cheery Hello? Who has said, “Just let me know if you need anything”? There’s no need to feel guilty about asking for help. Some people just like to help. It gives them a self-worth or a good feeling. Others can be rewarded with a return favor. Perhaps you can label folders for them at home, or feed their dog while they’re on vacation.

3. Support Groups

Every community has a support group for a variety of ailments, such as cancer and AAA meetings. Look in your phone book for listings on Dementia or Alzheimer’s disease, or go to national organizations online, and they will list local groups who register with them. Try [www.Family Caregiver Alliance](http://www.FamilyCaregiverAlliance.com) and www.alz.org

Under this category are religious organizations. A Person does not have to belong to a particular church to ask for help. Most churches have thriving volunteer groups that would welcome the request for assistance. Some have daycare services during the Sunday services.

4. Relatives

The same enticement of trading favors can be used with relatives. Using guilt can be more of a detriment than an lure. Ask the relative to make a list of ways they think they can help. Even monetary donations are helpful and should not be belittled. With money, the Caregiver can hire people to sit with the Person, or to hire people to do chores.

Start everything slowly. In the beginning, the Caregiver may only be able to manage 30 minutes of absolutely free “Me” time a week. They may progress to doing it twice a week. It is also important to experiment and see what works best for the individuals involved. One Caregiver might like breaks of 30 minutes every other day, while another might prefer 10 minutes every day after lunch. There is no one perfect solution. It’s just a matter of taking the first step.