

## Talking to Friends

Alzheimer's disease and other related dementias not only impact the person with the diagnosis but also those who care about them. After a diagnosis you may experience a variety of changes, talking with friends may be an outlet that can help you cope with these changes. Talking about the disease and what is happening in your life can provide you with a means of support. By bringing friends into your life and communicating what is going on for you can help your friends better understand what life is like for you now and what your needs may be.

As caregivers you may experience a number of different emotions, such as:

- Grief
- Guilt
- Anger
- Embarrassment
- Loneliness
- Exhaustion

It is imperative for you to spend time outside of your caregiving role. Sharing your problems and concerns with another person and taking time out for your self can be beneficial to your own health. If you don't look after yourself, you won't be able to look after someone else.

You may be asking yourself: Who do I talk to? How do I bring it up? When should I mention it? or How are my friends going to respond to me after I tell them?

Remember to keep in mind that there are no right or wrong answers to these questions.



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What is important is that you find someone to talk to that you are comfortable with. It may be that you meet friends for a coffee or you talk over the phone. Quite often I hear from families that once the diagnosis was made that many of their friends somehow disappeared. Some families don't want to discuss their situation because they don't want to burden friends. But talking about what is going on in your life can create a better picture for your friends and allow them to understand what is going on. Creating this understanding will be beneficial to you and the friends in your life. They may not know what dementia is or may not know what kind of changes you are experiencing as a caregiver. This unawareness can lead friends to:

- Want to give you space.
- Fear that by bringing it up, they may upset you.
- Believe that if you have not brought it up with them that you don't want to talk about it.
- Fear that if it can happen to your loved one that it could happen to their loved one and they would rather not talk about it.

If roles were reversed, how would you react to the news of your friend's situation?

Everyone will react to news differently, what is important is that you as a caregiver are looking after yourself and finding the support you need. You play an integral role in the life of the person living with dementia and if you do not ensure some support elements in your life, your role may become overwhelming.

There are other means of support other than turning to friends. These are:

- 1) **Support Groups** – Attending a support group can allow you the opportunity to talk about your situation and learn about dementia and caregiving. It is also a way to meet new people who understand your situation.



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- 2) **Get involved in hobbies or activities that you enjoy** – This can also be an effective way to meet new people that you have something in common with. It is also a way to stay engaged in activities that you enjoy. Finding time to get out and do things for yourself may be challenging but hobbies and activities are a great stress release.
- 3) **Online Support** – An online support group can be an easy way to interact with people in the same situation as yourself. If you have difficulty leaving the house because of your care responsibilities, communicating with other caregivers online may provide the support you need.

Just remember to take breaks from caregiving when you need them and to understand that it is not selfish but in the best interest of your loved one and yourself. Friends can be a great source of support. For more information on other networks of support, please contact me at (403) 290-0110 and I would be more than happy to discuss this with you.

Dahlia

