



Care Partner Information

Tips for Providing Older Adult Care

Depression in Alzheimer's Disease

Depression is common in people with Alzheimer's disease. About 4 out of 10 people who have Alzheimer's disease also have depression. Depression is most common in the first six months after an Alzheimer's diagnosis, but it can occur at any time.

It can be hard to tell if a person with Alzheimer's disease is depressed. Many symptoms of depression and Alzheimer's disease are the same. It is important to take the person to a doctor to know if the person is depressed. Doctors will look for changes in the person over time. They will look at the person's medical history, review medications, and do a physical and mental exam. Doctors will also ask questions about any changes in the person's mood and behavior. It is important to make note of sudden changes, and tell the doctor. Some examples of common changes are listed below.

Signs of depression with Alzheimer's disease	
Loss of interest or joy from hobbies or social activities	Not being able to focus, or make decisions
Loss of energy	Changes in sleep or eating
Feeling sad, empty, or hopeless	Does not talk or interact with others
Easily annoyed or angered	Feeling guilty
Being nervous or worried	Thoughts of death or suicide

If the person has depression, treatment may help improve the person's quality of life and ability to care for them self. Treatment will not prevent or cure Alzheimer's disease.

This Care Partner Information page is part of a series on older adult caregiving tips. They are written to help family and community caregivers, direct care workers and community health representatives care for older adults. Available in English and Spanish at www.aging.arizona.edu

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Depression in people with Alzheimer’s disease can be treated. Giving support can help a lot. Below are some ways to help people with depression and Alzheimer’s disease.

How to help people with depression and Alzheimer’s disease
Follow a daily routine. Pay attention to the best times of day for the person.
Save the harder tasks, such as bathing, for the person’s best time of day.
Make a list of activities, people and places the person enjoys. Include something from the list in activities every day.
Help the person to be active every day.
Find ways the person can join in activities and family life. Have them do as much as possible.
Tell the person they are loved and respected. Be sure to show love, respect and appreciation for the person.
Do not ignore the person’s feelings of sadness. Tell them you hope they feel better.
Consider finding a support group, or social group. Groups are available for persons with Alzheimer’s disease and for caregivers or family members.
Help the person set small goals for their daily activities. Celebrate when the goals are met.

In some cases, medications for depression also can help improve mood. Depression medication will only help with depression.

Caregivers of people with Alzheimer’s disease should pay attention to their own moods. Care giving for someone with Alzheimer’s disease is hard. Many caregivers experience depression. It is hard to be a good caregiver if you are depressed. Anger, tiredness, worry and sadness can all be signs of depression.

Caregivers with signs of depression should go to the doctor. Support groups and respite services also are available to help caregivers take breaks and be healthier. Healthy, relaxed caregivers provide better care. The Alzheimer’s Association has support groups, and can help find other services. A local office can be found with the eldercare locator: www.eldercare.gov, or call 1-800-677-1116.

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