

Caring for the Caregiver: A Resource Toolkit

Caring for someone with Alzheimer's can be so demanding that it's often hard to think beyond the immediate. But what if something were to happen to you? Caring for yourself, physically and mentally, is not a luxury – it's a necessity. One of your most important responsibilities as a caregiver is self-care, and a toolkit of resources that you can access as needed can be an invaluable help to you in that duty.

You Can Take Action

By understanding the most common challenges caregivers face and knowing the resources you can use to overcome them, you can head off burnout or exhaustion before they become overwhelming.

Ask for help when you need it. Every caregiver needs help at some time, but many find it hard to ask. Remind yourself that asking for help when you need it is actually a way of giving your loved one the best care. You can find home health care or adult day care services in your area using [Eldercare Locator](#) or find out about other options from your doctor or support groups. You should also learn the basics of [how to pay](#) for some of this help or respite care service.

Join a support group. Being a caregiver to someone with Alzheimer's brings challenges unlike caring for someone with any other disease. By joining a support group with other Alzheimer's caregivers, you can learn how others are facing similar challenges, share tips and insights and, most importantly, give each other support. The UsAgainstAlzheimer's [Facebook community](#) is a great place to start. You can also ask your doctor, check online, or contact the local chapter of the [Alzheimer's Association](#) to find a group that's right for you.

Make a back-up plan. If something were to happen to you, what would that mean for your loved one? It may not be something you want to think about, but it's better to plan now than face uncertainty if the time comes. Talk to family and close friends about who might take responsibility for the person with Alzheimer's and see what information your local public guardian's office, mental health conservator's office, adult protective services, or other case management services can offer. You can also find out about board and care or [long-term care](#) facilities in your community. Consider sharing

a few of these possibilities with the person who may be the next in line if you're unable to continue caregiving.

Find what helps you cope with emotions and stress.

While caring for a person with Alzheimer's, the challenge can be multiplied when the person lashes out, hurts your feelings or forgets who you are. It's important to remind yourself that what you're doing would be hard for anyone, that some things that happen will be beyond your control, that you're not perfect and that, even if you did everything perfectly, the person with Alzheimer's would still have a problem. Repeat these things to yourself whenever you need to hear them, and use these resources to reach out for help from these organizations: [iCare](#), the [AARP Caregiver Life Balance](#) website and the [Caregiving and Ambiguous Loss page](#) at the Family Caregiver Alliance. You can read more about useful tools in the book [Caregiving Both Ways](#).