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How You Can Help Someone Who is an Alzheimer's Caregiver

Nancy's Story...

Nancy is the primary caregiver for her husband, George, who has mid-stage Alzheimer's. It's exhausting work. She's on call 24/7 and often feels overwhelmed by her responsibilities, which seem never-ending. After four years of this, she's burned out. She doesn't have any time to herself and is neglecting her own health. Furthermore, her heart is broken as she watches George's memory and functioning steadily decline a little at a time.

Sally -- Nancy's best friend -- stands by and watches as Nancy becomes more worn out by the day. Sally would like to help but she doesn't have any idea what to do. Every time she asks Nancy how she can help, Nancy just says, "There's really nothing you can do." Sally takes this at face value and after a while stops asking.

Alzheimer's Caregivers

According to the Alzheimer's Association, 15.5 million people are serving as caregivers to people with Alzheimer's, providing over 17.7 billion hours of unpaid care every year. Carrying out their duties has a negative effect on their physical and mental health.

These people desperately need all the assistance they can get. It will help them preserve their own well-being. It will also help them improve their caregiving since no one can be a good caregiver if they're burned out all the time.

With so many people being Alzheimer's caregivers, chances are good that you know one - either a friend, relative or neighbor. And chances are that you'd like to help, but like Sally, you simply don't know how.

Many Alzheimer's caregivers are deeply dedicated and feel like they should be able to "do it all," and they are often so burned out they can't even imagine how anyone could assist them. In addition, they may be reluctant to ask for help because they don't want to impose upon people and because they're afraid people will refuse to help.

How Can You Help?

So if you really want to be of service, instead of just saying, "Let me know if there's anything I can do," you may need to figure it out yourself and volunteer for a specific task(s).

Here are but a few things you can select from:

1. Help clean the house
2. Take over extras from a meal you've cooked for your family
3. Do the laundry
4. Do the grocery shopping
5. Pick up medicines from the pharmacy
6. Volunteer to run other specific errands
7. Mow the lawn and/or do other yard work (assuming the person doesn't use a lawn service)
8. Visit and just let the person talk about feelings
9. Drive the person with Alzheimer's to their daycare center (if they're going to daycare)
10. Take the person with Alzheimer's to the doctor
11. Take the person with Alzheimer's out for a drive
12. Look after the person with Alzheimer's in your home for a few hours

With a little thought, you can certainly come up with additional tasks. Items 9 - 12 are especially important because they will give caregivers some badly-needed time alone to rest and recharge their batteries. But whatever you select, try to be specific and try to volunteer to do it on an ongoing basis. Make sure you will be able to continue your help before you make a commitment.

I can tell you from my personal experience as an Alzheimer's caregiver for seven years that *anything* you do will indeed be most helpful. I had *no* assistance and furthermore, I didn't even ask my friends to do anything for me. I only wish I'd read

an article like this one back when I was a caregiver. It could have made a big difference in my daily life and would have significantly reduced my stress. It also could have prevented my health from deteriorating as much as it did.

So the next time you see someone you care about serving as an Alzheimer's caregiver, consult this list, or come up with a task(s) on your own, and simply announce to the person that you are going to do it and tell them when you're going to start. He or she will probably be greatly appreciative, even if initially hesitant to ask for your support.

Marie Marley is the award-winning author of [Come Back Early Today: A Memoir of Love, Alzheimer's and Joy](#). Her [website](#), [ComeBackEarlyToday.com](#), contains a wealth of information for Alzheimer's Caregivers.

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