

## Caretakers for people living with Alzheimer's experience a high level of stress

Written by gallupsun  
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The physical, emotional and financial implications of stress are universal, and the National Institutes of Health cites those as it observes April as National Stress Awareness Month.

The sources of stress are as diverse as the people who undergo it, but one group that experiences stress day after day, occasionally for as long as 20 years, are the caregivers for people living with Alzheimer's disease.

More than 11 million Americans (3.3% of the total population), including 67,000 New Mexicans, are currently serving as volunteer caregivers for loved ones living with Alzheimer's disease. On average, they donate 31 hours per week to provide unpaid care.

According to the Alzheimer's Association 2024 Facts & Figures report:

- 59% of Alzheimer's family caregivers rated the emotional stress of caregiving as "high" or "very high"
- Caring for a spouse with dementia is associated with a 30% increase in depressive symptoms compared with spousal caregivers of partners without dementia
- The pressure of stress among Alzheimer's caregivers with a mean age of 64 is associated with a 32% prevalence of suicidal ideation vs. 2.7% for adults age 56 and older (exact age comparison not available)

### **10 SYMPTOMS OF CAREGIVER STRESS**

Recognizing the signs of caregiver stress is the first step to getting help. The Alzheimer's Association lists 10 symptoms of caregiver stress:

- **Denial** about the disease and its effect on the person who has been diagnosed. "I know mom is going to get better."
- **Anger** at the person with Alzheimer's or frustration that he or she can't do the things they used to be able to do. "He knows how to get dressed — he's just being stubborn."

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- **Social withdrawal** from friends and activities that used to make you feel good. "I don't care about visiting with the neighbors anymore."
- **Anxiety** about the future and facing another day. "What happens when he needs more care than I can provide?"
- **Depression** that breaks your spirit and affects your ability to cope. "I just don't care anymore."
- **Exhaustion** that makes it nearly impossible to complete necessary daily tasks. "I'm too tired for this."
- **Sleeplessness** caused by a never-ending list of concerns. "What if she wanders out of the house or falls and hurts herself?"
- **Irritability** that leads to moodiness and triggers negative responses and actions. "Leave me alone!"
- **Lack of concentration** that makes it difficult to perform familiar tasks. "I was so busy, I forgot my appointment."
- **Health problems** that begin to take a mental and physical toll. "I can't remember the last time I felt good."

Caregivers who experience any of these signs of stress on a regular basis should make time to talk to their doctor. In addition, the Alzheimer's Association offers a number of resources through its website ([www.alz.org](http://www.alz.org)) specifically for those providing care for loved ones with the disease:

- The Association's Community Resources Finder for assistance in finding local Alzheimer's care resources. Whether someone is living with memory loss or caring for someone who is, AlzNavigator, an online interactive tool, serves as a guide.
- ALZConnected online community and local support groups are all good sources for finding comfort and reassurance.
- The Association also has trained professionals who staff its free 24/7 Helpline (800-272-3900) to help direct caregivers to resources in their community.

"It is important to take care of yourself," Lorey Esquibel, Operations director of the Alzheimer's Association of New Mexico said. "Visit your doctor regularly. Try to eat well, exercise and get plenty of rest. Making sure that you are healthy can help you be a better caregiver."

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