

Tips for Caregiver Success

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Imagine falling into bed after a long day of hard work. The moment your head hits the pillow, you close your eyes and fall into a much needed sleep. Before you know it, you're startled awake as you hear footsteps above you. Your father has begun his nightly routine of wandering around your home. Since he moved in with you after his diagnosis of Alzheimer's disease, these sudden awakenings are part of *your* nightly routine as well.

As the caregiver for an individual suffering with Alzheimer's disease, you can become a "hidden patient," suffering the symptoms of caring full time for your loved one. You may notice that you aren't exercising regularly, aren't maintaining a proper diet, and may be unable to follow recommendations from your doctor on maintaining a healthy lifestyle. You're not alone.

Your physical and mental health are important as a caregiver since you play such a vital role in your loved one's daily activities and meet so many of their needs. Use these tips for success in your role as a caregiver:

Educate yourself - Learn as much as you can about Alzheimer's disease by reading books, consulting with healthcare providers, and asking individuals who have been a caregiver for their loved ones.

Communicate – Discuss your situation with family and friends. Take advantage of local support groups. Be involved in your loved one's medical care. The support system you will build is critical to your success.

Maintain your health – Make time for yourself. Pursue outside interests and hobbies, exercise regularly, and take advantage of adult day care and respite programs. If you notice early signs of depression, consult with your physician.

Caring for a loved one is a roller coaster of emotions, challenges, successes, and decision making. By investing in your own well-being as a caregiver, you are ensuring that your loved one will be able to continue being cared for by you for as long as you are able. Once you equip yourself with the tools you need to be a successful caregiver, you'll be much more likely to enjoy the ride!