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Changes in Intimacy and Sexuality in Alzheimer's Disease

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Intimacy is the special bond we share with a person we love and respect. Sexuality is one type of intimacy. It is an important way that spouses or partners express their feelings physically for each another. If you are a caregiver for your spouse or partner with [Alzheimer's disease](#), you may notice changes in [intimacy and sexuality](#) in both the person with Alzheimer's and yourself.

How does Alzheimer's affect intimacy and sexuality?

A person with Alzheimer's may be stressed by the changes in their memory and behavior. Fear, worry, [depression](#), anger, and low self-esteem are common. The person may feel dependent and cling to you. They may not remember your life together and their feelings toward you. Sometimes the person may even fall in love or seek companionship with someone else. Side effects from [medications](#), memory loss, and depression may affect their sexual interest.

You may pull away from the person with Alzheimer's in both an emotional and physical sense. You may be upset or exhausted by the demands of caregiving. The person's constant forgetfulness and [challenging behaviors](#) may make them seem like a stranger. Someone caring for their spouse or partner with Alzheimer's may also feel that it's not okay to have sex with someone who has this disease.

It takes time to learn how to cope with these challenges. It's possible to learn to live with the illness and find new meaning in your relationship with the person with Alzheimer's.



How to manage changes in intimacy and sexuality

Changes in intimacy and sexuality affect the person with Alzheimer's as well as their spouse or partner. Follow these tips to help cope with these challenges:

- Reassure the person with Alzheimer's that you love them and will keep them safe.
- Explore new ways of spending time together, such as walking around your neighborhood or playing a game together.

- Focus on nonsexual ways to show affection. Some caregivers find that snuggling or holding hands reduces their need for a sexual relationship.
- Try other nonsexual forms of touching, such as giving a massage, hugging, and dancing.
- Consider meeting your sexual needs yourself.
- Talk with a doctor, social worker, clergy member, or a support group about these changes. It may feel awkward to talk about such personal issues, but it can help.



[Read and share this infographic](#) about how to communicate with a person who has Alzheimer's disease.

Hypersexuality

Sometimes, people with Alzheimer's become overly interested in sex. This is called hypersexuality. The person may masturbate a lot or try to seduce others. These behaviors are symptoms of the disease and don't always mean that the person wants to have sex.

To cope with hypersexuality, try giving the person more attention and reassurance. As a caregiver, you should never feel like you must do something you are not comfortable with to appease your loved one. You might gently touch, hug, or use other kinds of affection to meet their emotional needs. Some people with this problem need medicine to control their behaviors. [Talk with a health care provider](#) about steps to take to manage hypersexuality.

You may also be interested in

- Learning more about [intimacy and sexuality in older adults](#)
- Getting tips for [how to choose a doctor you can talk to](#)
- Reading about [how Alzheimer's changes communication skills](#)

For more information

NIA Alzheimer's and related Dementias Education and Referral (ADEAR) Center

800-438-4380

adear@nia.nih.gov

www.nia.nih.gov/alzheimers

The NIA ADEAR Center offers information and free print publications about Alzheimer's and related dementias for

families, caregivers, and health professionals. ADEAR Center staff answer telephone, email, and written requests and make referrals to local and national resources.

Alzheimers.gov

www.alzheimers.gov

Explore the Alzheimers.gov website for information and resources on Alzheimer's and related dementias from across the federal government.

Alzheimer's Association

800-272-3900

866-403-3073 (TTY)

info@alz.org

www.alz.org

Alzheimer's Foundation of America

866-232-8484

info@alzfdn.org

<https://alzfdn.org>

Family Caregiver Alliance

800-445-8106

info@caregiver.org

www.caregiver.org

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