

9 Tips to Combat Caregiver Depression

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Depression is a serious and common challenge facing Alzheimer's family caregivers. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, they are at greater risk for depression than caregivers of people with other conditions.

"Alzheimer's family caregivers frequently put their family member's needs ahead of their own physical and emotional needs—often to the point where they become overwhelmed. Many experience depression brought on by exhaustion, stress, and feelings of isolation and loss. When these feelings start to occur, they shouldn't be reluctant to seek help or open up," said Jennifer Reeder, LCSW, SIFI, AFA's Director of Educational and Social Services.

"Everyone needs to replenish themselves, physically, mentally, and emotionally, and it's important that caregivers find ways to do that," she added.

Here are nine steps caregivers can take to help combat depression:

- 1. Ask family members and friends for support.** Many may be eager to help but not know how. Be specific and let people know what you need.
- 2. Try relaxation exercises,** such as meditation and yoga.

3. **Do physical activities.** The mind and body are interconnected.
4. **Take time for yourself.** Even something simple such as going for a walk can be relaxing.
5. **Look into respite care.** You'll be able to find more time for the things you need and want to do. Respite care provides short term relief for primary caregivers. It can be arranged for just an afternoon or for several days or weeks. Care can be provided at home, in a healthcare facility, or at an adult day center.
6. **Try journaling.** Express your thoughts, both positive and negative. By writing about what you are feeling, you may also become more aware of your stress and do something about it.
7. **Join a caregiver support group.** You will be with other people who understand exactly what you are going through and can share emotions and support, as well as practical advice and resources, in a safe and understanding environment.
8. **Get a good night's sleep.** Speak to your doctor if you are struggling with sleep problems.
9. **Pay attention to nutrition.** A diet rich in fresh fruits, vegetables, and healthful fats, while low in processed foods, may help with symptoms of depression.

AFA offers telephone-based support groups and can provide support, services, and connections with local resources through the AFA Helpline. Call 866-232-8484, webchat at www.alzfdn.org, or text 646-586-5283 to speak with a social worker.

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