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[U.S. Department of Health  
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## ALZHEIMER'S CAREGIVING

# Helping Family and Friends Understand Alzheimer's Disease

When you learn that someone has [Alzheimer's disease](#), you may wonder when and how to tell your family and friends. You may be worried about how others will react to or treat the person. Realize that people often sense when something has changed. By sharing what is happening, family and friends can help support you and the person with Alzheimer's disease.

There's no single right way to tell others about Alzheimer's disease. When the time seems right, be honest with family, friends, and others. Use this as a chance to educate them about Alzheimer's. You can:

- Tell friends and family about Alzheimer's disease and [how it affects memory, thinking, and behavior](#).
- Share [articles, websites, and other information](#) about the disease.
- Tell them what they can do to help, such as calling the person with Alzheimer's disease, providing meals, or helping with home repairs or safety modifications.



When a family member has Alzheimer's disease, it affects everyone in the family, including children and grandchildren. It's important to talk to them about what is happening. For tips on helping children cope when a loved one has the disease, see [Helping Kids Understand Alzheimer's Disease](#).

## Tips for Communicating

You can help family and friends understand how to interact with the person with Alzheimer's disease. Here are some tips:

- Help family and friends realize what the person can still do and how much he or she still can understand.
- Give suggestions about how to start [talking with the person](#). For example, make eye contact and say, "Hello

George, I'm John. We used to work together.”

- Help them avoid correcting the person with Alzheimer's if he or she makes a mistake or forgets something. Instead, ask family and friends to respond to the feelings expressed or talk about something different.
- Help family and friends plan fun [activities with the person](#), such as family reunions or visiting old friends. Video calls can be a great way to connect, too. Viewing a photo album together can help if the person is bored or confused and needs to be distracted. Family and friends could also create a care package or make a photo album or video to send to the person.

Remind family and friends to:

- Call or video chat at times of day when the person with Alzheimer's is at his or her best.
- Be calm and quiet. Don't use a loud voice or talk to the person as if he or she were a child.
- Respect the person's personal space, and don't get too close.
- Encourage a two-way conversation for as long as possible. Be patient when someone has trouble finding the right words or putting feelings into words. You can help them but try not to speak for them.
- Try not take it personally if the person does not remember you, is unkind, or gets angry. He or she is acting out of confusion.

[Get more tips on communicating with someone with Alzheimer's disease.](#)

## When You're Out in Public

Some [caregivers](#) carry a card that explains why the person with Alzheimer's might say or do odd things. For example, the card could read, “My family member has Alzheimer's disease. He or she might say or do things that are unexpected. Thank you for your understanding.”

The card allows you to let others know about the person's Alzheimer's disease without the person hearing you. It also means you don't have to keep explaining things.

Read about [this topic in Spanish](#). Lea sobre [este tema en español](#).

## For More Information About Helping Family and Friends Understand Alzheimer's

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

800-438-4380

[adear@nia.nih.gov](mailto:adear@nia.nih.gov)

[www.nia.nih.gov/alzheimers](http://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](https://www.alzheimers.gov)

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

This content is provided by the NIH National Institute on Aging (NIA). NIA scientists and other experts review this content to ensure it is accurate and up to date.

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