



## Looking After Yourself –

*If you are caring for someone with dementia*

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*My father's Alzheimer's disease was in the early stages and was not diagnosed or obvious to outsiders. Many of my mother's friends and acquaintances thought it was my mother, not her husband, who had a health problem.*

*My sister and I found this hurtful, frustrating and confusing. My mother sometimes questioned whether in fact there was anything wrong with her husband and whether his odd behaviour and poor short-term memory was in her imagination. My mother also wondered if she was the one who had something wrong and whether she also had Alzheimer's disease. My mother was extremely distraught and stressed. As well as this, adverse comments by others did nothing to allay my mother's fears, or support her in her daily trauma of coping at home alone with my father.*

Caring for someone with dementia can be very demanding. Burnout due to stress, combined with physical exhaustion, can happen to even the most dedicated families and carers.

It is important to remember and acknowledge that you have needs and that you can take positive steps to meet them. You will only be able to continue caring effectively if you take care of yourself.

### Take time for yourself

It is important for yourself, and the person you are caring for, to have regular breaks and participate in activities that you enjoy. This will help you to relax and recharge and for the person with dementia it can mean new faces and activities to look forward to.

One way to do this is to arrange regular respite care for the person with dementia. Respite care provides a substitute carer to relieve the regular carer on a planned basis or in an emergency. It gives the



regular carer a chance for a rest. Where possible it is a good idea to plan respite care well in advance to help families and carers get the substitute care when and where they need it.

Respite care may be provided in different ways depending on the individual situation. Care may be provided:

- in a residential care facility
- in your home
- in community based day programs such as day clubs.

Some families and carers find it difficult to take breaks or use respite services. Some feel guilty leaving the person with dementia in someone else's care, or perhaps the person does not want to be without you, even for a short time. If you are finding it difficult to take a break, talk to someone about your feelings.

## Share your feelings

It can help to share your feelings. Chat to a trusted friend, relative, counsellor or your doctor. You can join a support group and meet other families and carers and share your experiences. Many people find comfort and practical assistance by attending these groups with others who know what it is like to care for a person with dementia. Alzheimer's Australia can link you to a support group in your local area.

## Ask for help

It is difficult to be a carer 24 hours a day, 7 days a week without help. Family and friends may be able to assist you if you let them know how to help. Many community organisations can help families and carers by arranging a break from caring, or providing information and advice about support services in your local area.

