

Alzheimer's Challenges for Volunteers

How can you help community members suffering from Alzheimer's?

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Alzheimer's Disease: An Overview

Alzheimer's effects one's short-term and long-term memory, cognitive function, and behavior, and is the most common form of dementia. Individuals over 65 years of age are the most susceptible to developing the disease. There is no cure, and it is important to understand that the disease is progressive, worsening over time. Eventually those who are afflicted with Alzheimer's "lose their ability to respond to their environment and hold conversations, however, they can live 4-20 years after an initial diagnosis" (<https://www.alz.org/alzheimers-dementia/what-is-alzheimers>). Additionally, "approximately 5.8 million people in the United States age 65 and older live with Alzheimer's disease. Of those, 80% are 75 years old and older. Out of the approximately 50 million people worldwide with dementia, between 60% and 70% are estimated to have Alzheimer's disease" (<https://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/alzheimers-disease/symptoms-causes/syc-20350447>).

How does Alzheimer's Disease affect individuals?

Alzheimer's effects the brain's by presenting individuals with the following cognitive symptoms:

1. Disorientation
2. Memory loss
3. Thinking and reasoning
4. Ability to carry out daily tasks
5. Making judgements and decisions
6. Mood, personality, and behavior changes
7. Deepening confusion about events, and time and place
8. Unfounded suspicions about family, friends, and caregivers

Alzheimer's effects one physically by causing difficulty with being ambulatory, speaking, and swallowing.

How does Alzheimer's Disease affect a survivor's family members and friends?

"Psychologists often refer to the families and caregivers of those with memory loss as the 'invisible second patients' as it has a ripple effect that can impact the entire family" (<https://unicityhealthcare.com/effects-alzheimers-disease-family-members-caregivers/>).

Because caregivers are required to provide continuous care on a 24/7 basis, they often become emotionally overwhelmed and experience physical burnout. Subsequently, caregivers experience extremely high rates of physical illness, financial challenges, work-related stress, and diminished emotional well-being including social isolation, emotional distress, and depression

How can volunteers support community members affected by Alzheimer's Disease?

Volunteers can support community members affected by Alzheimer's Disease in many ways. Some of the many ways volunteers can provide assistance is to help Alzheimer's patients and their families

1. Assisting with eating and drinking
2. Providing physical activity and exercise
3. Make the home dementia friendly by establishing daily routines
4. Helping them make decisions and manage difficult decisions regarding care
5. Creating a safe environment for everyone to share their feelings and experiences

Another excellent way for volunteers to support community members afflicted with Alzheimer's is to provide therapy through such resources as an Emotional Support Animal; this only requires an ESA letter from a medical doctor or mental health professional.

Additionally, there has been much research indicating that music therapy produces good results for those suffering with dementia, especially with respect to their anxiety.

RESOURCES

- A. <https://www.alz.org/alzheimers-dementia/what-is-alzheimers>
- B. <https://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/alzheimers-disease/symptoms-causes/syc-20350447>
- C. <https://www.alzheimers.org.uk/get-support/daily-living>
- D. <https://unicityhealthcare.com/effects-alzheimers-disease-family-members-caregivers/>
- E. <https://tech.snmjournals.org/content/46/4/335>
- F. <https://www.alz.org/media/cacentral/documents/advocacy-95-volunterism.pdf>
- G. <https://www.brainybehavior.com/blog/2007/07/volunteering-as-therapy-for-individuals-with-dementia-of-the-alzheimer%E2%80%99s-type/>