

Caregivers may benefit from adult day care

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Caring for an elderly family member can be stressful and can pose health threats to caregiver givers. Steven Zarit, professor and head, Department of Human Development and Family Studies, Penn State, received a \$3 million grant from the National Institute on Aging to study the effects of caregiving on familial caregivers. He will look at people who care for family members with dementia and how adult day care impacts the stress levels of all individuals involved.

People with dementia experience progressive memory loss, which can lead them to act out in ways that are not always easy to handle. They may try to leave the house, struggle with dressing, reject help and become agitated. This erratic behavior requires constant surveillance and any lapses in vigilance could lead to danger. Trained professionals are more prepared to deal with these types of behaviors and often experience less stress than family members.

"Using adult day care can reduce stress for family members by lifting the burden of responsibility from them for a few hours," said Zarit. "At the same time, day care provides stimulating activities that promote sleep and well-being in those being cared for."

Zarit will interview and collect saliva samples from [caregivers](#) on eight consecutive days to test both self-perceptions of stress and physiological stress. Because adult day care is typically used only three or four days a week, he will be able to assess how stress levels fluctuate when day care is used or not used.

"In many studies that test stress in individuals, the subjects might only have one day that they experience high stress," said Zarit. "In this experiment, though, participants will experience several days of high stress. This should give us a better understanding of the mechanism through which [stress](#) affects our health and it will be able to tell us what happens physiologically when someone reports having a good or bad day."

Through his research, Zarit will be able to assess whether or not using day care truly improves the health of people suffering from [dementia](#) and their family members. He will work with 180 participants over three years, primarily with adult day care centers in New Jersey, which are known for providing excellent day care service.

Source: Pennsylvania State University ([news](#) : [web](#))

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