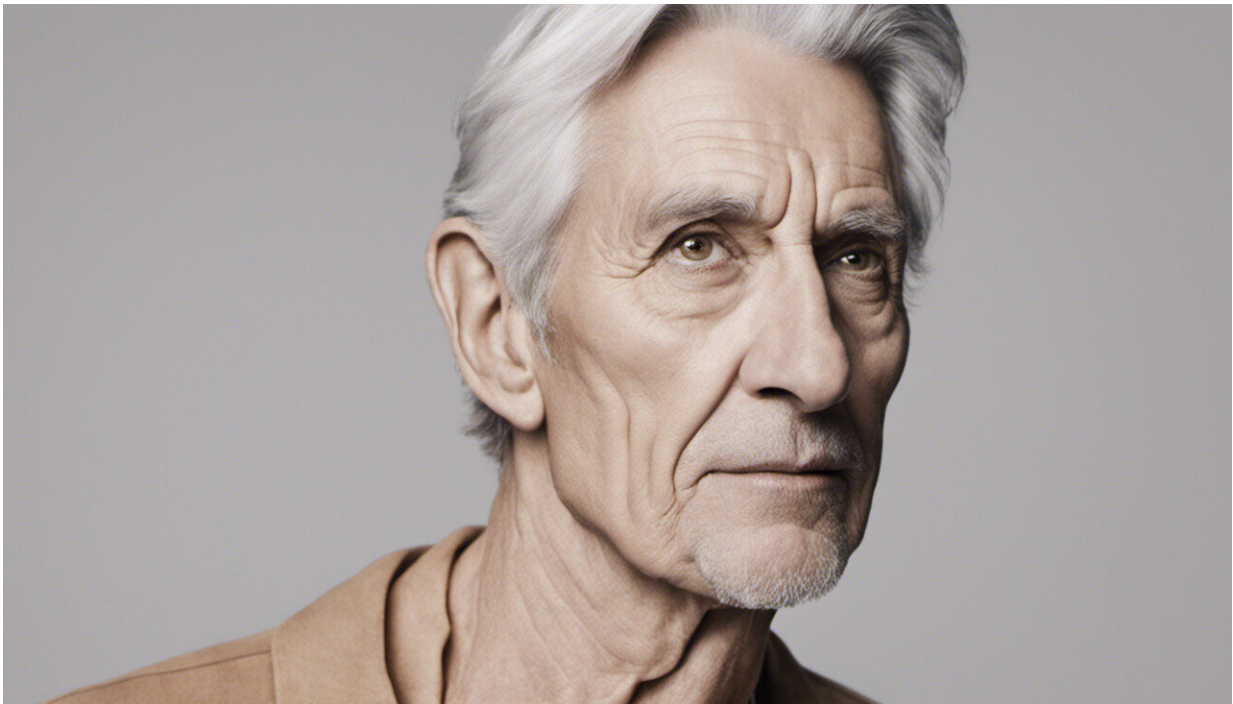


Five things to know when a loved one is diagnosed with Alzheimer's

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Credit: AI-generated image ([disclaimer](#))

Seeing the personality and whole being erased in loved ones with Alzheimer's disease can be a heart-wrenching experience.

Mental health expert Maria Aranda, executive director of the USC Edward R. Roybal Institute on Aging, doesn't want you to go through it

alone. The associate professor at the USC Suzanne Dworak-Peck School of Social Work distills her 30-plus years of helping caregivers manage stress into five critical categories you need to master as you help your family member face Alzheimer's.

How should I interact with a family member who has Alzheimer's?

Keep in mind that Alzheimer's affects each person differently at different stages, and what works at the early stage may not work later.

Don't define your loved ones by their disease. Treat them like an adult, not a child. Don't talk about them within earshot as though they don't understand what's going on. Respect their ability to communicate what they feel, believe and want.

Try to see things from their perspective and use humor to lighten the mood. Don't give too many requests at one time. Don't get stuck on having them see your side of things. Focus on the feelings behind the words.

Establishing daily routines can be a huge help. Identify what routines make sense and be flexible when they don't work out as planned.

How can I make my home safer?

Again, different strategies work for different stages of the illness. Identify hazards and take preventive measures to avoid falls, scalds and burns. Consider removing rugs that may cause slips. Keep medications out of reach. Install safety features such as door knob safety covers to prevent your loved ones from wandering away from home and getting lost.

How can I balance caregiving and caring for myself?

It can be hard for caregivers to ask for help. But if you need help, reach out to family and friends. Health care and social service providers such as [home health care](#) or adult day care services can also provide relief. Resources are available that may help pay for outside help.

Maintain a healthy lifestyle. Try to do things you would normally do—like eating healthy food, exercising, spending time with friends and pursuing hobbies and interests. And get regular health checkups.

How should I manage my stress?

Emotional distress is normal when you're a [caregiver](#), so remind yourself that you're doing the best you can and that you can't control everything. Seek all the information you can on Alzheimer's, such as what to expect and how to prepare for the future.

Find meaning and purpose in your role as a caregiver. Look for the brighter side of things, and take things one day at a time.

Share! Caregiver support groups allow you to share feelings with peers who can offer tips on how to overcome challenges. If you are religious, going to church, temple or mosque may allay stress. Mental health professionals, including social workers, can guide you away from interpersonal conflicts, anxiety or sadness.

Are there online resources?

There are many. The [Alzheimer's Association](#) offers several free online tools that can help you find answers, resources and support. [AlzConnected.org](#) allows you to connect with people facing similar

issues. A [community resource finder](#) locates local caregiver resources, services and programs.

[AARP](#), the [National Institute on Aging](#), the [Family Caregiver Alliance](#) and the [National Alliance for Caregiving](#) also have useful information.

Provided by University of Southern California

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