

A SURVIVAL GUIDE FOR DAUGHTERS CARING FOR MOTHERS WITH ALZHEIMER'S



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Mothers and daughters often have a very special connection, one that changes and grows over time as the role of caregiver shifts. If your mother has been diagnosed with Alzheimer's, this gradual transition can sometimes be much more abrupt and filled with uncertainty.

As Alzheimer's begins to set in and you begin to care for your mom more and more, it can feel like uncharted terrain. Many daughters find it difficult because every day can be different. However, there is some good news. With some thoughtful strategies and plenty of perspective, you and your mother can still maintain that connection, even as the Alzheimer's progresses. Here are some "survival guide" directions to consider:

1. FORM YOUR TEAM



Many daughters are tasked with being a mother's primary caregiver, or at least taking on an overwhelming amount of responsibility. That's when it's time to get the team together.

Even something as seemingly minor as running errands or cooking meals can take much longer when you're doing them with a mother who has Alzheimer's. Delegating as much as possible—for example, having someone else do the grocery shopping, or getting groceries delivered—can give you more time to enjoy with your mom, not concerned that you can't get everything done.

Look at every task and ask whether you can recruit other family members and friends to help. Maybe instead of making a Sunday brunch for the family, you turn it into a potluck. Maybe you hire a housekeeper to come once a week who can do laundry as well as clean. That way, you can focus on leisurely activities that your mom has fun doing with you.



2. PRACTICE AMPLE SELF-CARE



The term “self-care” tends to get used for short-term fixes for stress, like setting aside evening time for yourself. But when your mother has Alzheimer’s, it will likely take much more than an occasional hot bath and movie night to help you reset. This is especially true if you’re like most daughters in this situation, and are caring for others in addition to your mom.

To be there for your mother, you need to first be there for yourself. Otherwise, you risk burnout, which is very common among caregivers and can be detrimental to your health. There’s even a name for it: “compassion fatigue.”

In addition to delegating tasks in order to prevent feeling overwhelmed, consider these self-care strategies:

- Exercise regularly.** Research has shown that consistent, daily physical activity can help reduce stress to a dramatic degree, particularly if you can go outside. If possible, bring your mom! Studies also suggest that outdoor exercise like walking can be very helpful for people with Alzheimer’s, improving mood and quality of life.

2. PRACTICE AMPLE SELF-CARE (CONT.)



•**Focus on sleep.** Balancing caregiving with work schedules and family time often leads to trimming down on amount of sleep every night, thinking you can “make it up” at some point. But your brain needs that 7 to 9 hours per night to function properly. Making sleep into a priority instead of a nice-to-have is crucial for staying emotionally and physically healthy.

•**Talk to other daughters.** Having your family-and-friends support network is important, but sometimes, you just want to talk to someone else who knows exactly what you’re experiencing. There’s a reason online and in-person support groups exist—it’s because they can be incredibly useful for sharing your feelings in a supportive, understanding environment.

•**Make Friend Dates.** One of the biggest parts of compassion fatigue is feeling isolated, probably because your caregiving schedule may have led to putting some friendships on the back burner. But social interaction, especially those where you can talk about topics unrelated to Alzheimer’s, is vital for getting a sense of balance. Schedule friend time in advance and stick to it, make a coffee date just as important as a medical appointment—because when it comes to self-care, it is.

Self-care should never get pushed down on the to-do list in favor of items that are “more important.” Your emotional health should always be a daily priority.



3. INVESTIGATE MEMORY CARE OPTIONS



As you know, Alzheimer's is a progressive condition, so it's helpful to know what your options may be for the future, even if that's years ahead. Although your mom may require help with just appointment scheduling and errands right now, there may come a time when she needs assistance with eating, walking, bathing, and going to the bathroom.

Later-stage Alzheimer's requires specialized care from people trained not only in what those with Alzheimer's need, but also family dynamics that might be at play.

Even if your parent has just been diagnosed and is at an early stage, consider looking into what options are available in your area, including a potential transition from the parent's home in the future. Take some time to visit communities and learn what they offer, speaking with team members at each about what to expect.



4. OPEN UP COMMUNICATION



The earlier you start conversations about what's ahead, the more input you can get from your mom about what she wants, and what's most important to her. These are not easy talks to have, but as many daughters have discovered, being uncomfortable now is much better than having to make all the decisions yourself later.

If you both find it particularly difficult to address potential care transition topics, consider talking with a counselor together. Sometimes, it's very helpful having another person, especially one who's sensitive to caregiving issues, navigate the conversation for you.

Whatever might be ahead, remember that you're not alone. Many daughters and mothers are in your situation, and numerous specialists—including memory care team members, physicians, counselors, and social workers—are available to help guide both of you through this time.

By drawing on support, and keeping the conversation going with your mom, you're likely to find that you can enjoy your time together much more. You can be there for her, and for yourself, and celebrate the bond you share.

Learn more about Five Star Senior Living's Memory Care Services by visiting <https://www.fivestarseniorliving.com/our-services/alzheimer-s-care>





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