



Redwood Falls

# ACT on Alzheimer's NEWSLETTER

Volume 6

**In an effort to raise awareness, educate our community and assist families who have been touched by Alzheimer's disease, this month's article will highlight ideas on how we can help the caregiver.**

Too often caregivers neglect their own health and well-being & put their own needs on the back burner. Sometimes caregivers become a 2<sup>nd</sup> victim of the disease that afflicts their family member.

When you board an airplane, the flight attendant gives several safety instructions. One of them is "if oxygen mask drops down put on your oxygen mask first before helping others." This is because if you don't take care of yourself first, you may not be able to help those who need your help. It's the same thing with caregiving. When you take care of yourself everyone benefits. Ignoring your own needs is not only potentially harmful to you, but it can also be harmful to the person who depends on you.

Unfortunately, stress among caregivers is extremely common. Caregivers often try to do everything by themselves, which eventually leaves them worn out and unable to fully attend to everything they are expected to do. Furthermore, ignoring the symptoms of stress can affect physical and mental health and lead to burnout, and make it impossible for the caregiver to continue caring for their loved one.

What are some signs of stress?

- Feeling overwhelmed or constantly worried
- Feeling tired most of the time
- Sleeping too much or too little
- Gaining or losing a lot of weight
- Becoming easily irritated or angry
- Losing interest in activities you used to enjoy
- Feeling sad or depressed
- Having frequent headaches, bodily pain or other physical problems

These are important messages from your body to listen to. Ignoring these messages can result in harming your own health & wellbeing.

Here are some ideas to manage the stresses you may be experiencing.

- Give yourself permission to accept help. Be prepared with a list of ways others can help you.
- Focus on what you are able to provide. Don't surrender to guilt. You are doing your best.
- Get connected. Find out about caregiving resources that can make your caregiving duties easier. We have a comprehensive brochure of resources available – free to caregivers. Contact our office to receive a copy.
- Eat healthy meals.
- Get enough sleep
- Make time for activities you enjoy. Reading, music, painting or doing crafts, quilting, visiting with friends. Even if only for a few minutes. If you like to go to church activities or belong to a club or organization – ask a friend or family member to stay with you loved one.
- Get regular medical & dental checkups.
- Join a support group.

Again in 2016 we will be offering a 6 week course entitled Powerful Tools for Caregivers. This educational program is designed to provide you with the tools you need to take care of yourself while caring for another person. You will learn to:

- Reduce Stress
- Improve self-confidence
- Better communicate your feelings
- Find a better sense of balance
- Increase your ability to make tough decisions
- Locate helpful resources

For more information about the Powerful Tools for Caregivers classes or Redwood Falls ACT on Alzheimer's call or e-mail Karen Christensen, ACT on Alzheimer's Coordinator at 507-627-1016 or [ace.redwood@co.redwood.mn.us](mailto:ace.redwood@co.redwood.mn.us)

Your input and assistance is valuable. Let's ACT together as we work to create a dementia capable community.