

CAREGIVER NEWSLETTER

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WHY CAREGIVERS OF PERSONS DIAGNOSED WITH ALZHEIMER'S DISEASE AND OTHER RELATED DEMENTIAS ARE AT HIGH RISK FOR SLEEP DEPRIVATION

Quentin decided that this year, he would have his mother and father stay over at his home a few days for the holiday. His mother was diagnosed with Alzheimer's Disease a few years ago and it had become too difficult [and even hazardous] for her to prepare family meals. Quentin will not quickly forget when she put the pie, metal tin and all, in the microwave to "warm it up a little bit." Sparks flew, literally, and his mother just stood there and laughed with his kids watching the display of 'fireworks' coming out of the microwave. Thank goodness his wife Naya was nearby to intervene before anyone got hurt.

What has been troubling Quentin even more is how drained and tired his father always seems to be now. He cannot remember the last time he saw his father without dark circles around his eyes and looking half awake during the day. His father used to always enjoy interacting with his grandchildren- reading them stories, performing cards tricks for them, and listening with fascination to their chit chat. Now, he will ask to lay down to 'rest his eyes for a bit' shortly after Quentin and his family come to visit. When Quentin asked his father about how tired he has been, his father was quick to reassure him that he's "fine," and that his mother "just doesn't sleep through the night like she used to but it's no big deal." Quentin and Naya did some research about sleep issues that caregivers and their loved ones diagnosed with Alzheimer's Disease and other dementias often struggle with. They decided they would have his parents spend a few nights over so they can observe their sleeping patterns.

One reason caregivers are at high risk for sleep deprivation is due to changes occurring in their loved ones sleeping patterns which keep them up at night. According to the National Sleep Foundation at www.sleepfoundation.org: "With Alzheimer's Disease [AD] the loss of brain tissue that leads to loss of mental abilities may also disrupt the sleep/wake cycle, which may cause sleep problems, nighttime wandering, and agitation."

"The amount of sleep disruption in AD patients usually depends on the stage of their disease. Patients in the early stages of AD may sleep more than usual or wake up disoriented. As the disease progresses, patients may begin to sleep during the day and awaken frequently throughout the night."

"Sleep is the best meditation."

Dalai Lama



In This Issue

- Changes in sleep patterns for persons diagnosed with AD and other related dementias
- Caregiver-specific causes for sleep disruption and deprivation



“Patients with more advanced AD rarely sleep for long periods. Rather, they doze irregularly throughout the day and night. Circadian rhythms - daily cycling of body temperature, sleep, wakefulness, and metabolism - are sometimes disrupted in older adults. Evidence suggests that these disruptions may be worse in patients with AD and that AD patients may lose the ability to stay asleep or keep alert as the disease progresses. Sleep problems may also increase agitation among AD patients, according to the results of at least one study.”

“Another feature of AD is ‘sundowning,’ a term used to describe an increase in agitated behavior that occurs in the evening. This increased agitation may be explained by sleepiness or it may be that agitated behavior is more troublesome to caregivers after sun down. Whatever their causes, agitation and sleep problems result in severe stress for caregivers and are among the top reasons AD patients are given care in nursing homes instead of at home.”

AD may also be linked genetically with obstructive sleep apnea (OSA). In a recent study, researchers at Stanford University Medical Center found that a gene associated with OSA is also associated with a higher risk of AD and other chronic illnesses such as heart disease. These results highlight the complexity of AD and shed light on the need to treat the range of symptoms associated with it in order to offer patients the best possible quality of life.”

Another reason is that, according to the Family Caregiver Alliance (<https://www.caregiver.org>), “Caregivers often find themselves exhausted at the end of the day, but many are still not able to sleep. Varying studies have documented that approximately 70% of caregivers for people with dementia report sleep problems, 60% report sleeping less than 7 hours, and 10-20% use alcohol to go to sleep and/or sleep medication. In data collected by the California Caregiver Resource Centers, 41% of caregivers said they are awakened during the night by the care receiver. These same caregivers also scored higher on the depression screening.”

“Insomnia comes in several forms—trouble falling asleep (more than 30 minutes), trouble falling back asleep after waking at night (e.g. to use the bathroom or care for someone else), waking up early and not being able to fall back asleep, or waking up not feeling refreshed. People with depression and anxiety also have a higher incidence of insomnia.”

There are many contributors to insomnia including:

- Caregiver role strain/stress, other stressful life events, trauma
- Eating too much or too late in the evening
- Many medications and medical conditions can interfere with sleep
- Sleep-related disorders like apnea and restless legs syndrome can also affect falling and staying asleep
- Caffeine, nicotine, and alcohol are well-known sleep adversaries
- Other factors that change during life such as activity levels, hormonal changes, injuries and/or sustained pain i.e. arthritis, schedule changes due to shift changes at work, traveling or retirement, etc.



HAPPY NEW YEAR

Next month, the effects of sleep deprivation on caregivers plus tips to help them and their loved ones sleep better will be explored.

Our Caregiver Support Groups are still being held virtually on Zoom and can also be accessed by phone. One group is specifically for caregivers of loved ones diagnosed with Alzheimer’s Disease and other related dementias. The other is a caregiver support group for husbands, sons and other male caregivers to discuss challenges that arise for them. For more information, please contact: adultdaycare@onegeneration.org