

Caregiver Chronicles

March 2016



AREA AGENCY ON AGING OF DANE COUNTY
2865 N SHERMAN AVE, MADISON, WI 53704
608-261-9930
[HTTPS://AAA.DCDHS.COM/](https://aaa.dcdhs.com/)

**“Spring passes and one remembers
one's innocence.
Summer passes and one remembers
one's exuberance.
Autumn passes and one remembers
one's reverence.
Winter passes and one remembers
one's perseverance.”**

—Yoko Ono



Wisconsin Historical Image ID 77621

When an Elderly Loved One Needs Extra Help

Family members of aging adults typically travel one of two paths to becoming a caregiver: the sudden sprint, or the gradual march.

The sudden sprint towards providing care for a loved one is often set off by an unexpected event—a stroke, a fall, complications from surgery—which acts as a catalyst, escalating your family member's care needs practically overnight.

The gradual march in the direction of caregiving is less abrupt. You can't say exactly when it began, but you've started noticing little changes in how your family member interacts with the world around them. Perhaps they're getting lost while driving to the grocery store, maybe they're having trouble keeping track of their medications, or balancing their checkbook—tasks they've performed countless times over the years, without any problems.

If an aging family member is consistently exhibiting these kinds of behaviors, they may soon be in need of extra care.

(Continued page 2)

Caregiver Chronicles

(When an Elderly Loved One Needs Extra Help, continued from page 1)

Here are 22 common signs your loved one may need extra help:

Physical

- Fluctuating weight
- Balance problems
- Poor hygiene
- Sleeping too much or too little
- Unexplained burns and bruises (especially on the legs and arms)

Home environment

- Unkempt yard
- Unusual carpet stains
- Excessive clutter (several weeks' worth of newspapers, piles of junk mail)
- Unusual odors (urine, garbage)
- Not enough food in the house
- Failure to turn off stove, or water after use

Emotional

- Mood swings
- Abusive behavior (most likely verbal)
- Lack of motivation
- Uncharacteristically anti-social behavior

Cognitive

- Confusion
- Memory loss
- Repetition
- Hallucinations

Other

- Dents and scratches on the car
- Unfilled or untaken prescriptions
- Unpaid bills



Whether these problems appear suddenly or slowly, they are all warning signs that indicate your loved one is having trouble attending to their own needs.

Being able to identify the presence of these red flags as soon as possible will enable you, your aging loved one, and the rest of your family to come up with a plan that ensures everyone's needs get met.

Normal Aging, or Alzheimer's Disease: What's the Difference?

As a loved one ages, one of the questions that may come up for you and your family is how to tell the difference between the cognitive changes associated with "normal aging," and those that could signal serious health conditions, such as dementia.

At this time, there's no definitive way to distinguish between benign memory slips, Alzheimer's, or other forms of dementia, but it may help to consider this as a general rule of thumb: occasionally misplacing the car keys is normal, while forgetting what to do with them is not.

Here are a few additional indicators that your loved one's cognitive troubles may be caused by something more serious than the simple advance of age:

- Bad judgment (poor financial decisions, public outbursts)
- Movement issues (stiff movements, hunched posture)
- Loss of inhibition (saying or doing socially inappropriate things)
- Language problems (can't form coherent sentences)
- Hallucinations and delusions (seeing things that aren't really there)
- Trouble performing familiar tasks (can't remember how to get to the doctor's office)
- Memory loss that interrupts daily life (regularly forgets recent conversations)

Ultimately, it's up to you and your family to determine if, and when, a loved one's cognitive issues warrant investigation by a medical professional.

Provided courtesy of AgingCare.com, the go-to destination for family caregivers. AgingCare.com offers resources and support for those [taking care of elderly parents](#). This article is one of a series of articles included in the eBook, *Family Caring for Family*. Download your free copy at www.AgingCare.com/ebook.

Find Support in Your Caregiving Role

Talk to someone who provides care for an aging loved one and they will tell you what a difficult and stressful job caregiving can be. The American Medical Association states that the role of caregiving places demands on the caregiver that leaves them at risk for health problems, including serious illness and depression. And, according to the *American Journal of Public Health*, middle-aged and older women who care for their spouses are six times more likely to suffer from depression or anxiety disorders than their non-caregiving counterparts. The result of this decline in health by the caregiver not only affects the person giving the care, but it may also compromise the care they provide.

Reading information like this may make caregiving sound bleak and discouraging. We also know that caregiving can be a very rewarding job. The key difference between a caregiver who is barely hanging on and one who is happy and at ease, is needed support in their role as a caregiver. Caregivers who are healthy and content receive help with tasks such as providing personal care and housekeeping, and they also take regular breaks from caregiving. Most importantly, they have an emotional support network.

The American Medical Association suggests to physicians that “a referral to a support group should be recommended for all caregivers.” Oftentimes, people hear the words “support group” and immediately tune out. They are uncomfortable with the idea of sharing their feelings. Or, they think of a support group as a bunch of people sitting around whining about their lives. But support groups are much more, and the benefits they offer are valuable.

Support groups are defined as a gathering of people in similar situations who provide each other with moral support, practical information and coping tips. Benefits of attending support group meetings include:

- **Valuable information.** One of the best resources for caregivers is other caregivers!
- **Coping skills.** The information and advice provided by the group can assist with problem-solving many challenging situations caregivers experience.
- **Emotional support.** Others in similar situations can offer encouragement and acknowledge both the joys and concerns related to caregiving.
- **Safe space.** Identify and express stressful feelings in a confidential setting. This support can improve your mood and decrease feelings of distress.
- **Affirmation and advocacy.** The group serves as a source of validation and can offer avenues to

local resources.

Attending support group meetings can help you feel less alone, give you new strategies to cope with day-to-day stressors, and affirm you in your role as a caregiver. The result will be a healthier, happier you, which in turn, means better care for your loved one.

—Jane Mahoney, *Older American's Act Consultant*
Greater Wisconsin Agency on Aging Resources

Looking for a Caregiver Support Group in Dane County? Unable to find respite for your loved one or transportation to a group? Call Jane De Broux, Dane County Caregiver Coordinator, at 608-261-5679 or email debroux.jane@countyofdane for more information.

If you find it difficult to leave your home or are not comfortable in group settings, the *Caregiver Call-In* might be right for you. This Wisconsin-based telephone support group is free and open to caregivers across the state on the 2nd Tuesday of each month from 1:00 – 2:30 p.m. Call (877) 416-7083 for more information or to register.

CAREGIVER NEWS ONLINE

Caregivers: 4 Reasons Support Groups Will Be Your Lifeline

While in the throes of caregiving, I resisted attending support groups. *I'm college-educated – heck, I even have a postgraduate degree! I don't need support group! I can read about what I need to know.* Then I grew desperate with uncertainty and worry. What if my father locks himself in the bathroom and turns on the hot water? Nearly all caregivers hit that point when we need information from those in-the-know and could honestly use some support from like-minded people.

Read more: <http://bit.ly/1TzBsdp>





Dementia Supper & Support - March 22

Presented by:

Alzheimer's Association

For Caregivers & Persons with Dementia

3rd Tuesday of the Month (starts March 22) 6pm-7:30pm

Northwest Dane Senior Services
1837 Bourbon Rd
Cross Plains, WI 53528
Contact Bonnie Nutt, bnutt@alz.org or 608.203.8500

Note: This is for caregivers and persons with dementia. A meal will be provided and then the group will split; support group for caregivers and activity for persons with dementia.

Visit alz.org/scwisc to learn more about caregiver programs and resources. To further extend your network of support, visit ALZConnected®, our online community, at alzconnected.org.

Build a support system with people who understand.

Alzheimer's Association® caregiver support groups, conducted by trained facilitators, are a safe place for caregivers, family and friends of persons with dementia to:

- Develop a support system.
- Exchange practical information on caregiving challenges and possible solutions.
- Talk through issues and ways of coping.
- Share feelings, needs and concerns.
- Learn about community resources.

800.272.3900 | alz.org®



Find us on Facebook!

The Caregiver Alliance has a Facebook page!

Click the link above to “like” us and get useful caregiver information, article links, and news about the latest events.



To learn about valuable caregiver resources contact:

Jane De Broux
Caregiver Program Coordinator
608-261-5679
debroux.jane@countyofdane.com

Communication Tips and Strategies

Learn ways to effectively and compassionately communicate with someone who has dementia.

Monday, March 14

5:30 – 7:00 p.m.

Hawthorne Library

2707 E. Washington Ave., Madison

Free. No registration required. For more information, contact ADAW, 608.232.3400.



The Aging and Disability Resource Center of Dane County (ADRC)

The ADRC offers free, unbiased information and assistance on resources and services for older people and adults with disabilities. Staff provides information to all callers regardless of their income, assets, age, or disability, and they help callers identify options, solve problems, and plan for the future.

Open 7:45 am—4:30 pm Monday through Friday



Call (608) 240-7400

Visit the ADRC office 2865 N Sherman Ave, Madison

Appointments are not necessary

Website: www.daneadrc.org

Email: ADRC@countyofdane.com

Caring for the Caregiver Program

AREA AGENCY ON AGING OF DANE COUNTY

2865 N. Sherman Ave.
Madison, Wisconsin 53704



Phone: 608-261-5679

Fax: 608-240-7402

Email: debroux.jane@countyofdane.com

Save paper and reduce postage costs

Please let us know if:

- You are willing to receive the newsletter via email
- You are no longer interested in receiving the newsletter

Contact:

Jane De Broux

608-261-5679

debroux.jane@countyofdane.com