

**I Have Alzheimer's
Homepage**

Know What to Expect

Get Educated

Just Diagnosed

Sharing Your Diagnosis

Changes in Relationships

If You Live Alone

**Treatments and
Research**

Plan for Your Future

Legal Planning

Financial Planning

Building a Care Team

End-of-Life Planning

Programs and Support

Overcoming Stigma

Younger-Onset

Alzheimer's
Live Well
r Taking Care of Yourself
Reducing Stress
Tips for Daily Life
Helping Family and Friends
Leaving Your Legacy
Live Well Online Resources
Make a Difference

Taking Care of Yourself

You will experience good days and bad days with Alzheimer's disease, but an emphasis on living a healthier life can help prepare you to live well and focus your energies on what is most important to you.

A healthy life with Alzheimer's

Physical health

Emotional and psychological health

Social health

Spiritual health

A healthy life with Alzheimer's

Living a healthy life with Alzheimer's disease involves examining the influences that impact your experience living with dementia. The health benefits associated with maintaining your physical, emotional, social and spiritual health may help improve your daily life.

By educating yourself about the disease, developing effective coping strategies and planning for the future, you can create a solid foundation from which to cope with new challenges and changes.

Caring for your physical health

Take care of your physical health with diet and exercise. Adopting a healthy lifestyle can help you live well with your diagnosis for as long as possible.

Use these tips to maintain your physical health:

- Get regular checkups. Establish a relationship with a physician you trust.
- Establish a routine for diet and exercise.
- Create a care team that understands your physical health needs and can help you monitor or respond to any changes that occur.
- Listen to your body! Rest when you are tired and be mindful of overextending yourself.
- Drink only minimal amounts of alcohol.
- Do not change medications and/or dosages without first checking with your doctor.

Exercise

Multiple studies have shown the benefits of physical activity for individuals with Mild Cognitive Impairment (MCI) or Alzheimer's. Research suggests that mild-to-moderate physical activity may help delay or slow a decline in thinking skills, reduce stress, possibly help improve symptoms of depression, and may even reduce risk of falls. Some evidence also suggests that exercise may directly benefit brain cells by increasing blood and oxygen flow. Even stronger evidence suggests exercise may protect brain health through its proven benefits to the cardiovascular system.

Live healthy

Learn how you can live a healthy and balanced life with dementia.

Get Started

You may want to try a group exercise class, where you can connect with others who enjoy similar activities. Aerobic exercise, increasing your heart rate for 20 to 30 minutes, provides the most benefit for physical and cognitive health. Try vigorous walking, bicycle riding or tennis.

If exercise was a part of your life before your diagnosis, keep doing it. An active lifestyle may help preserve your sense of independence and identity. If you are not an active person, consider including exercise as a part of your daily routine. Always check with your physician before starting a new exercise routine.

Learn more: Exercise for seniors at go4life.nia.nih.gov

Healthy eating

Although a balanced diet has not been proven as an effective treatment to address symptoms of Alzheimer's, the best current evidence suggests that heart-healthy eating patterns, such as the Mediterranean diet, also may help protect the brain. A

Mediterranean diet includes relatively little red meat and emphasizes whole grains, fruits and vegetables, fish and shellfish, and nuts, olive oil and other healthy fats.

Learn more: [Healthy eating at choosemyplate.gov](https://www.choosemyplate.gov)

Mental stimulation

There is no conclusive evidence that brain exercises can slow or reverse cognitive decline. However, learning new information, taking a class, or challenging yourself to try a new hobby or activity may help increase your brain activity. Some types of mental exercises may have the added benefit of connecting you with others socially, which also may improve your mental health. If you enjoy mental stimulation or brain exercises, keep doing them.

Caring for your emotional and psychological health

Coming to terms with a serious diagnosis like Alzheimer's disease involves embracing changes in your emotional state. You may experience unwanted feelings and emotions, which may be triggered by your relationships with others, your experience with stigma or your frustration with daily changes. One of the most important things you can do is talk about your feelings with someone you trust such as your spouse, partner, pastor or counselor. Sometimes a different perspective can be helpful as you learn to adjust to living with the disease and cope with difficult feelings.

At times, your emotional state and responses may be the symptoms of Alzheimer's. You may have frustration, anger or confusion, and have no control of your emotions. As a result, you may be unsure of yourself around family and friends or in social situations. Learning to express yourself can help you cope with emotional responses, and help those around you react in the most appropriate ways.

Try these tips for enhancing your emotional health:

- Allow yourself to experience a range of emotions. There is no right or wrong way to feel.

- Learn about how others living with the disease are overcoming stigma to support their emotional health.
- Consider meeting with a trusted friend or advisor.
- Join a support group of others in the early stage.
- Maintain close relationships. This will provide you with support when you feel overwhelmed by emotion. Others can provide you validation.
- Establish a social network that includes others living in the early stage. A good place to start is joining our ALZConnected online community.

Sadness or depression?

It is normal to feel sadness about your diagnosis. But when sadness takes hold and moves into depression, it's time to get help from your doctor as depression is treatable.

Warning signs of depression include:

- Feelings of sadness or unhappiness that last most of the day nearly every day.
- Decline in interest or pleasure in almost all activities most of the time.
- Difficulty making decisions or easily distracted.
- Fatigue, tiredness and loss of energy almost every day — even small tasks may seem to require a lot of effort.
- Feelings of worthlessness or guilt, fixating on past failures, and blaming yourself when things aren't going right, and experiencing these feelings almost every day.
- Trouble thinking, concentrating, making decisions and remembering things. (This is also common in Alzheimer's disease, so it may not be as reliable as other signs.)
- Frequent thoughts of death, dying or suicide. If you have suicidal thoughts or attempts, call 911 or go to the nearest emergency room.
- Crying spells for no apparent reason.

- Changes in sleep patterns or appetite.

Caring for your social health

Strong relationships and an active social network can have an impact on your health. Connecting with others who also are living in the early stage can be a comforting and satisfying experience. These individuals truly understand what you're going through. Building a support network with others like you can help normalize what you're experiencing, reduce the impact of stigma and improve your quality of life.

At first, you may be hesitant to engage in social activities for fear of making a mistake or having difficulty with communication. Consider pursuing activities that you enjoy or that satisfy you so much, that you can move past your hesitation. You can also find early-stage social engagement programs near you.

Caring for your spiritual health

A diagnosis of Alzheimer's disease or serious illness can inspire a focus on spirituality and life's greater purpose. Enhancing your spiritual life can help you cope with challenging feelings, find meaning in your diagnosis and live your life more deeply.

Who each of us is at our core is more than our former jobs, things we are good at doing or even the conversations we have with others. The core of who we are is what we think of when we talk about the "self" or our "spirit." Connecting with our core being and what is most significant to us is our spirituality.

Now that you are living with Alzheimer's disease, it may feel as if you are going to lose those things that give you a sense of who you are — your job, the things you love to do, your accomplishments, your role as a parent or partner, etc. These represent only parts of who you are. They have to do with who you are in relation to something outside of yourself. Your personal sense of self comes from within.

Some people find their spiritual core through church or connections with their spiritual community, or through being in nature. Others find the essence of self through solitary activities that calm the mind, like meditation, yoga or prayer. Still others find it through the love of family and friends, by engaging or just being with those who provide understanding and acceptance.

Self and spirituality

Research shows that the essence of "self" remains with us and can be a source of strength and coping in the face of serious illness. There are times for all of us when priorities get reassessed. These times often come when major changes or significant losses occur; such events bring the opportunity to consider what is most important to focus on and what to let go of.

A diagnosis of Alzheimer's brings big issues and questions to the forefront. Sometimes things get forgotten or pushed down on the priority list when we are living busy lives.

Explore your own spirituality by taking some time to answer some of these questions:

- Who or what do I usually turn to for strength in difficult times? Can I use those supports now?
- What has grounded me over the years? How can I incorporate some of those things into my day-to-day life?
- How do I experience peace and serenity? How can I build some part of that into my routine every day?
- How do I understand the meaning of this disease in my life?
- How can I help others? Whether I know them or not, how can I make life better for other people?

To learn more about how to incorporate spirituality into your life with Alzheimer's, see our [Spirituality and Alzheimer's Disease \(PDF\) reading list](#).

Tips from people living with Alzheimer's: Emotional changes

1. If you have rapid changes in mood or a short temper, be more mindful of negative responses. Understand that your reaction is caused by the disease.
2. When it comes to guilt, clarify why you have this feeling. If you need other points of view, seek out your allies and bounce it off them. Then make a clear decision and move forward, whatever the plan. Remember that guilt is often self-imposed for no logical reason.
3. If today is not going well, don't force it. Stop and do something you enjoy.

[See More Tips](#)

Next: Reducing Stress →