

The Value of *Humor & Laughter* in the Journey of Alzheimer's



If you're one of over 16 million people in the United States caring for a loved one with Alzheimer's Disease or dementia, you're already familiar with the many challenges of caregiving. As the person you once knew begins to lose their memory and cognitive function, it can become difficult to retain your sense of humor and positive outlook.

Despite the challenges, both you and your loved one can benefit from the power of everyday human connection—including humor and laughter. If someone you care about is suffering from Alzheimer's or dementia, try to find the humor in your day to day life. And here's how!

1. Don't Be Afraid to Laugh (Button 1)

First of all, it's important to acknowledge that Alzheimer's and dementia are serious disorders that present unique challenges to caregivers. However, you're still entitled to retain your joy, positivity, and sense of humor despite the difficulties.

If you open yourself up to the possibility of laughter, you may find that certain situations become a little funnier and, therefore, easier to handle. The fact is that the short-term memory loss, confusion, and other symptoms of Alzheimer's and dementia can actually bring up some

funny conversations. Dementia can lower inhibitions, so topics that might have been taboo to the person before—like sex or foul language—suddenly become a reality.

And here's the truth: it's okay to laugh if your loved one says something that's unusual and out of character. Of course, it's important that your loved one never feels like you're mocking them or being unkind. But in general, if something happens that's humorous, don't be afraid to laugh.

2. Laughter Is Healthy for Caregivers (Button 2)

The effects of laughter have been researched so closely that there's even a name for the field of study: gelotology. If you have a loved one who's going through Alzheimer's or dementia, you could probably use the boost that laughter gives. Here are some facts on laughter and how it impacts your state of mind:

- **Releases endorphins:** These feel-good brain chemicals are naturally released by laughter. They improve our overall sense of well being.
- **Balances emotions:** Laughter has been shown to decrease sadness and anxiety, and even help diffuse anger. In general, it's believed to be great at bringing balance to emotions.
- **Helps with grief:** For both you and your loved one, sharing a laugh can help you gain a positive outlet for grief.
- **Eases depression:** Many studies have shown the positive effects a good laugh can have on feelings of distress and depression.
- **Increases bonding:** Sharing a laugh with someone can help you bond with that person, establishing a connection even for those whose communication abilities have diminished.

As a caregiver, it's normal to experience some strong emotions like sadness and stress. That's why it's so important for you and your loved one to try and harness the healing power of laughter whenever possible.

3. Laughter Brings Joy to Alzheimer's Patients (Button 3)

Laughter is also a powerful medicine for Alzheimer's patients themselves. In fact, one fascinating study found that humor therapy was very effective at reducing agitation in patients with dementia.

Recently, we encountered an [incredible story](#) of Dana Klein Modisett, whose mother Muriel was struggling with Alzheimer's. Muriel lost her appetite, wanted to sleep all the time, and was very uncommunicative. This all changed when Dana decided to hire a comedian to talk to her mother. Within moments, Muriel was laughing and smiling. Shortly thereafter, the positive effects rippled out to the rest of her life; Muriel was more engaged, communicative, and friendly.

Wonderful stories like these emphasize this important point: it's so important to promote laughter and joy during this otherwise difficult time. Many patients with Alzheimer's experience high levels of agitation and stress, and incorporating humor back into their lives can reintroduce some much-needed normalcy into their lives.

4. Find Connection with Others (Button 4)

Sometimes, caring for a loved one with Alzheimer's or dementia can make you feel a little isolated. Though your friends and family certainly empathize with your situation, it's very important to discuss your experiences with other caregivers. By scheduling weekly in-person or online meetups, you can exchange stories — both the sad and the humorous — to find a connection.

Get started by taking advantage of the many resources for caregivers, from support groups to informative blogs. If you're not sure how to get started with your new support community, The Alzheimer's Association offers some incredible resources for those with loved ones with Alzheimer's:

- You can find your [local chapter](#), which usually offers Alzheimer's support groups.
- The [online community](#) offers a chance to connect with others online.
- Check out the Alzheimer's Association [forum](#) for help and perspective.

It's important to find like-minded people who can listen to your stories and share funny stories of their own. By laughing and commiserating together, you can help work through some of the stress and even make new friends.

5. To Laugh Is Human (Button 5)

We're all human beings. Sometimes, caregiving for a loved one with Alzheimer's or dementia can make us forget that it's our right to live, laugh, and have fun. If you love someone with Alzheimer's, then you've undoubtedly been through some tough times. Stress and tension can build up over time, and you can start feeling disconnected from your sense of humor.

Give yourself the gift of a laugh now and then. While still respecting your loved one and their struggle, allow yourself some much needed indulgence in humor. And think of these wise words:

All you need in the world is love and laughter. That's all anybody needs. To have love in one hand and laughter in the other. -August Wilson

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