

# Helping Family and Friends Understand Alzheimer's Disease

When you learn that someone has Alzheimer's disease, you may wonder when and how to tell your family and friends. You may be worried about how others will react to or treat the person. Realize that family and friends often sense that something is wrong before they are told. Alzheimer's disease is hard to keep secret.

There's no single right way to tell others about Alzheimer's disease. When the time seems right, be honest with family, friends, and others. Use this as a chance to educate them about Alzheimer's. You can:

- Tell friends and family about Alzheimer's disease and its effects.
- Share articles, websites, and other information about the disease.
- Tell them what they can do to help. Let them know you need breaks.

When a family member has Alzheimer's disease, it affects everyone in the family, including children and grandchildren. It's important to talk to them about what is happening. For tips on helping children cope when a loved one has the disease, see "Helping Children Understand Alzheimer's Disease," [www.nia.nih.gov/alzheimers/publication/helping-children-understand-alzheimers-disease](http://www.nia.nih.gov/alzheimers/publication/helping-children-understand-alzheimers-disease).

## Tips for Communicating

You can help family and friends understand how to interact with the person with Alzheimer's disease. Here are some tips:

- Help family and friends realize what the person can still do and how much he or she still can understand.
- Give visitors suggestions about how to start talking with the person. For example, make eye contact and say, "Hello George, I'm John. We used to work together."



- Help them avoid correcting the person with Alzheimer’s if he or she makes a mistake or forgets something. Instead, ask visitors to respond to the feelings expressed or talk about something different.
- Help family and friends plan fun activities with the person, such as going to family reunions or visiting old friends. A photo album or other activity can help if the person is bored or confused and needs to be distracted.

Remind visitors to:

- Visit at times of day when the person with Alzheimer’s is at his or her best.
- Be calm and quiet. Don’t use a loud voice or talk to the person as if he or she were a child.
- Respect the person’s personal space, and don’t get too close.
- Not take it personally if the person does not recognize you, is unkind, or gets angry. He or she is acting out of confusion.



### For more caregiving tips and other resources:

- **Read** “Caring for a Person with Alzheimer’s Disease”: [www.nia.nih.gov/alzheimers/publication/caring-person-alzheimers-disease](http://www.nia.nih.gov/alzheimers/publication/caring-person-alzheimers-disease)
- **Visit** [www.nia.nih.gov/alzheimers/topics/caregiving](http://www.nia.nih.gov/alzheimers/topics/caregiving)
- **Call** the ADEAR Center toll-free: 1-800-438-4380

## When You’re Out in Public

Some caregivers carry a card that explains why the person with Alzheimer’s might say or do odd things. For example, the card could read, “My family member has Alzheimer’s disease. He or she might say or do things that are unexpected. Thank you for your understanding.”

The card allows you to let others know about the person’s Alzheimer’s disease without the person hearing you. It also means you don’t have to keep explaining things.

---

The Alzheimer’s Disease Education and Referral (ADEAR) Center is a service of the National Institute on Aging, part of the National Institutes of Health. The Center offers information and publications for families, caregivers, and professionals about Alzheimer’s disease and age-related cognitive changes.

