



## **The Effects of Alzheimer's Disease on Families**

With Alzheimer's Disease, many losses occur while the person you love is still alive. This is an unusual concept in the language for grief and loss. Alzheimer's disease, among other diseases, creates such ambiguous loss because the loved one is physically present but psychologically absent; the personality of the person you love becomes less recognizable.

The isolation from this disease occurs on many, many levels, both for the person with the disease as well as the family taking care of him. Losses occur every time the illness pulls the person with the disease a little farther away:

- away from awareness of themselves, such as how they are dressed
- away from awareness of their environment, such as where the bathroom is located
- away from awareness of how others are feeling by their tone of voice or facial expressions
- away from words that communicate what they think, need, want, and fear
- away from their very identity as a brother, sister, parent, spouse, partner, Linguistics professor, etc.
- away from their knowledge of how to accomplish every day activities they used to do without a thought

Families also experience losses as the disease progresses:

- loss of a shared history, memories of traveling or special things the family did together
- loss of a sense of humor and the ability to communicate feelings warmth and love for the family the person with Alzheimer's finds harder to recognize
- loss of the role that person played in the family and their relationship with each family member.

The struggles surrounding dementia and aging are a part of life that is not talked about enough. Alzheimer's disease is cruel and many families suffer alone as they cope as best they can. If you know a family that is affected by Alzheimer's disease, reach out by preparing a meal, sit with the person who is ill, run errands, mow the lawn, do the dishes, pick up prescriptions and ASK about the person who is sick. It is often helpful to discuss the nitty gritty of care giving with someone else. Support the local organizations who serve Alzheimer's patients and their families. Lobby for research dollars for both prevention and treatment.

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