

The day that everything changed

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One of a diagnosis of **Alzheimer's disease (AD)** often comes as a surprise. Once received, life seems to be divided into a "before" and an "after." The diagnosis changes not only the life of the person diagnosed, but also the lives of those around them (Frisoni et al., 2025). The future becomes uncertain, and the entire family embarks on a new path.

As the diagnosis sinks in, it becomes necessary to rethink priorities, reorganize responsibilities, and sometimes take on new roles. A slow, evolving grieving process for the life that existed before the illness may also begin. Often, someone becomes the **primary caregiver** almost involuntarily, not because they chose to, but because circumstances dictate it (Alzheimer's Association, 2024).

As the **AD** progresses, each stage can present new challenges, making daily life unpredictable. We often hear, "Take it one day at a time." However, living with a **person with dementia (PwD)** can teach us otherwise: often, we can only take it one moment at a time.

The emotions, behaviors, and needs of **PwD** and their **caregivers** can change unexpectedly. This does not mean that anyone is doing something wrong. These changes are part of the disease's progression and are not a reason for either the **PwD** or the **caregiver** to feel guilty (Lee et al., 2025).

That is why it is essential to pay attention to **caregivers**. Caring for another person is a huge challenge that can make setting aside time for yourself seem selfish. However, self-care is not selfish; it is a necessity. Self-care allows you to recharge and sustain the challenge of **caregiving** in the long run.

When the day feels like it lasts 36 hours, small gestures can make a big difference (Cheng et al., 2022; Sanchez-Martinez et al., 2024).

- Allow yourself to take a step back for moment.
- Before reacting impulsively to a difficult situation, take a deep breath.
- Set aside a few minutes to do something that makes you feel good and helps you reconnect with yourself, try not to lose your own identity.
- Accept help and build a support network.

- Set aside at least one moment each week exclusively for yourself.

It's important to recognize that difficult emotions are normal. Frustration, sadness, guilt, fear, and extreme exhaustion are all normal parts of this process.

Experiencing these emotions does not mean that you are failing as a **caregiver**. You can't do everything right all the time.

Adapting to **AD** means learning new ways to relate to the person in front of us at any given moment and understanding the cognitive, emotional, and behavioral changes that may arise (Tieu et al., 2022). The focus is not on forgetting who they used to be, but rather on finding new ways to connect with who they are today.

Although an **AD** diagnosis can change many things, the person is still much more than their illness. According to Matthews (2026), preserving their dignity, identity, and life story through person-centered care allows them to maintain meaningful relationships.

Perhaps days aren't what they used to be, and we have to learn to live one moment at a time. But moments of connection, affection, complicity, and hope are still possible.

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