

Visitors per Month: 882,100

Caring for someone with Alzheimer's takes a toll on NJ caregivers

About 170,000 people have Alzheimer's disease in New Jersey. Caring for someone with the disease and other forms of dementia is a fact of life for a majority of New Jersey residents. It's stressful, difficult and time-consuming, according to the nonprofit Alzheimer's New Jersey.



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In a recent survey conducted by Fairleigh Dickinson University on behalf of the organization, 29 percent of respondents say they care or have cared for someone with Alzheimer's disease.

President and CEO, Ken Zaentz says of those, 85 percent say caring for someone with Alzheimer's has had a negative impact on their emotional health, stress level and their feeling of isolation.

Women are hit harder than men with 42 percent of women and 31 percent of men saying it has affected their emotional well-being a great deal.

The so-called "sandwich generation" —people caring for both their own families and their aging parents — felt the most dramatic impact on their emotional health.

Family relations are also under pressure when you are an Alzheimer's caregiver. Zaentz says 72 percent of those who identify themselves as caregivers said that their family relations are strained.

One of the contributing factors to caregiver stress and strain is the amount of time it takes.

More than half say they spend more than 20 hours per week on caregiving activities and 27 percent devote more than 40 hours per week.

The activities that you enjoy doing as an individual all has to be put aside, says Zaentz, because caregiving takes up all of your time.

The reason why it takes so much time is because people with Alzheimer's are physically healthy for a long time, adds Zaentz. He says the average life span for a person with Alzheimer's from point of diagnosis is anywhere between eight and 10 years. As the disease progresses and a person becomes dependent on someone else, you can see the overwhelmingly emotional stress it can create for the caregiver.

The survey also finds that women caregivers outnumber men with 33 percent of women and 25 percent of men serving in that role. That's because "women tend to be the caregiver whether it's the spouse, or the daughter or the daughter-in-law. Women tend to take on that caregiving role more than men do," says Zaentz.

He says getting support is vital for the Alzheimer's caregiver. 53 percent say they receive help from one or two other people. Only 16 percent do it alone.

Alzheimer's disease has a huge impact on New Jersey. Zaentz says there are ways for people to come together to raise awareness, connect with each other, offer support and raise money.

Three walks are lined in October to do just that:

— Oct. 7 – Liberty State Park

— Oct. 22 – Princeton University

— Oct. 29 – Bergen Community College.

For more information on these walks, visit www.alznj.org