

# National Alzheimer's Awareness Month and National Family Caregiver's Month

By Shannon Nosbisch, CDP, DCS

In 1983, President Ronald Reagan proclaimed November as National Alzheimer's Awareness Month. At that time, about 2 million people had been diagnosed with this disease. In 2022, that number has grown to over 6 million people living with Alzheimer's Disease and is expected to increase. In addition to that number, there are the families, caregivers and friends of people living with Alzheimer's, that are being affected, too. They are your neighbors, co-workers, friends and families.

Caring for someone with Alzheimer's has greatly changed over the years. Now the recommendations are to keep a person engaged with games, puzzles or photos, keep them on a daily schedule, join their world, etc. The focus is on what they CAN do, not what they can't do. Though they are struggling with everyday activities, they need to feel useful.

Even with these recommendations, caring for a loved one living with Alzheimer's disease is extremely stressful. Some of the **effects** on Alzheimer's **caregivers** include sleep deprivation (77%), less exercise (69%), gaining or losing weight (66%), strains or aches (63%), high stress/anxiety (60%), poor eating habits (56%), depression (60%), and putting off their own **medical** care (20%).

If you are a caregiver, you need to keep these things in mind: keep yourself healthy (exercise, eat right, go to yearly doctor appointments), ask for help (have a list of things others can do – make a meal, fix something around the house, come for a visit - for you and the person living with Alzheimer's), join a support group (there are a lot online now), practice relaxation techniques. One of the best things to do is to educate

yourself on the best way to care for your loved one. We realize that none of this is easy, but it is necessary.

We can all do our part to make conversations about Alzheimer's disease and caregiving the norm in our society. Below are a couple of ideas and recommendations that you can try to celebrate National Alzheimer's Awareness and National Family Caregivers month.

Share a post on social media about Alzheimer's dementia, bring or mail a gift card to someone you know who is in a caregiving role, call someone you know who is living with dementia or their caregiver to check in, Educate yourself about Alzheimer's and other dementias and how to communicate, Learn common early symptoms of Alzheimer's and other dementia, ask your doctor for a cognitive assessment with your yearly wellness check, donate to an agency or non-profit that is supporting people living with Alzheimer's disease or other dementia.

To educate yourself about Alzheimer's disease or other dementia, our Forget-Me-Not resource centers have movies and books that can be checked out WITHOUT having a library card. These resource centers are in the Effingham Public Library, Evans Public Library (Vandalia), Flora Public Library, Newton Public Library, Greenup Township Public Library, Mattoon Public Library and Shelbyville Public Library. Ask at the desk for location within the library.

Effingham Area Alzheimer's Awareness and Midland Area Agency on Aging are collaborating to make Effingham a dementia friendly community. Effingham is now listed on the national and state lists as a dementia friendly community. Being dementia friendly means that businesses, organizations, agencies, groups, churches and the general public are knowledgeable about what dementia is, how to recognize dementia, how to communicate with someone living with dementia and how to support families and caregivers. If you would like your business

to be trained as a dementia friendly community member, please call Shannon at 217-663-0010. The training is 30 minutes long and is free.

Some websites that can be useful to families and caregivers are:

Caregiver.org (Family Caregiver Alliance)

Alz.org (Alzheimer's Association)

Wearehfc.org (Hilarity for Charity)

Effingham Area Alzheimer's Awareness also has a website at [www.effinghamalz.org](http://www.effinghamalz.org). There are tipsheets for caregivers and Memory Moment and Forget-Me-Not Spotlight articles.

Please support a family and/or caregiver today!!

*Effingham Area Alzheimer's Awareness (EAAA) is a volunteer-run, not-for-profit organization founded to provide education and support to all families, caregivers, and people with Alzheimer's disease and related dementia in Effingham County and the surrounding area. For more information about Effingham Area Alzheimer's Awareness, check out the website at [www.effinghamalz.org](http://www.effinghamalz.org). If you are a caregiver & have specific questions or situations you would like information on, please feel free to call Shannon Nosbisch at 217-663-0010 or Amy Sobrino at 618-363-8372.*