



## **HERE'S HOW YOU CAN HELP**

### **When people ask how can they help, tell them:**

- **Offer** to sit with my husband/wife, even if I do not leave the house. This will give me time to do other things around the house and garden.
- **Come** for a visit when you can, but call first to confirm that it will be convenient. We both get lonely and bored. Don't assume that the Alzheimer's patient needs rest at the expense of communication or that communication must be a 2-way street.
- **Talk** to my spouse, who can understand some things even though he/she cannot respond. Even if there is no understanding, it is comforting to have a friend there to pretend that my spouse does understand. We do not know what gets through.
- **Be** patient and understanding. Put yourself in my spouse's place and imagine what you would feel like when memory fades and you become more and more helpless. Hold his/her hands. Give praise but no scolding or corrections.
- **Make** a specific offer to help – say, "I want to come over Monday at 3:00 to bake, clean house, do laundry, or whatever." If you say, "Call me anytime for anything," I won't know what you want to do or when you are free....so I probably won't ask.
- **Offer** to watch TV with my spouse some afternoon when an old movie is on. Bring a book or magazine in case he/she falls asleep. This will give the feeling that his/her company is still enjoyable without either having to entertain the other.
- **Suggest** coming over to take my spouse for a walk. Exercise is terribly important, but I sometimes cannot find time for a walk, and my husband/wife enjoys it; be ready to hold his/her hand.
- **Encourage** your wife/husband to come over to visit us in the evening. My spouse enjoys company (even for me), and it gives me a chance to have a normal, sensible conversation, when my spouse cannot do so.
- **Cook** dinner or other meal entrée and stay to eat with us if you can. Familiar company helps both of us. Be prepared to eat slowly and don't be surprised when food gets spilled.
- **Bake** cookies, brownies, bread, etc., or something special that my spouse likes – a favorite recipe. If possible, make enough so some can be frozen.

- **Run** errands. Find out what needs to be done. Take my spouse along while you do shopping or do an errand.
- **Once** in a while, when I can get a sitter, join me for an evening meal at a restaurant and/or some entertainment such as the theater, a concert or a movie. I need to have some stimulating and enjoyable time.
- **Offer** to help at holiday and birthday times. Assist in buying gifts, wrapping presents, trimming the Christmas tree or anything else you can think of.
- **Even** if the joke is terrible, tell it. Bring Reader's Digest or other material, and read aloud. Describe what is funny out there. It may not tickle my spouse's ribs, but it won't hurt. Speak to that part of my spouse that is still alive, for that is the real person.
- **Touch** or hug my spouse if you feel like it. The isolation of being mentally out of it is pretty devastating.
- **Bring** some music – cassette tapes or records. If you play an instrument, bring it along, even for practice. Sing some old-time songs with my spouse ("Let Me Call You Sweetheart", etc.). Music brings pleasure and even memories, when non-musical memories are gone.
- **Tell** my loved one how great he/she looks, even if you have to stretch the truth a bit. Self-esteem is terribly important when the power to do things has weakened or gone.
- **Tell** us about the real life you are living. This will help my spouse to feel less like an untouchable and may give the sense that he/she is still involved in the world of normalcy. One of the hardest things about Alzheimer's disease for both of us is the problem of conversation. If you don't talk to us about the real world, we are left with meals, birds, flowers, weather and TV to talk about and gradually most of those are disappearing from my spouse's world.
- **Go** to a meeting with my spouse – most any kind. You may meet friends who will enliven his/her life for a moment, even if forgotten two minutes later. Take him/her to Senior's Lunch, so I can get away by myself or have time to catch up on correspondence, house cleaning or even a nap.

*The Marin Chapter of the Alzheimer's Association in San Rafael, CA acknowledges that the inspiration for this came from a beautiful leaflet made by the late Wendy Bergen, who wrote a similar leaflet as she was suffering with terminal cancer.*