

**Caregivers Connection**

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**Ambushed by Loneliness**

*From a Caregiver's Journal: Yesterday we went to a retirement celebration. There were a lot of people there. Ed stuck to me like glue. He followed me around like a puppy dog. Eventually, the two of us sat by ourselves at a table until a women joined us. I was happy to have someone to talk with. I realized another change in my life because of Ed's increasing dementia. In social situations, I need to tend to him and can't just mix with others on my own while he does the same. Loneliness gripped me as I watched others talking and laughing and enjoying themselves when Ed and I were alone.*

Caregivers are experts in loneliness. First, there is often loss of companionship when a loved one develops a chronic debilitating illness, dementia, or end-stage disease. This leads to a feeling of loneliness for the caregiver.

In addition, caregivers and their loved ones may experience feelings of isolation when friends no longer include them in plans and they don't stop by. Also, caregivers may be so busy tending to the needs of their loved ones that they don't have time to participate in activities they once enjoyed with others.

Social isolation can cause a decline in physical health and even lead to death. Even the brain is changed: research has shown that people with a large social network have different brain structures than those with a smaller support system. It can speed up

aging. Loneliness can lead to unhealthy behaviors such as overeating or skipping meals, smoking, and alcohol abuse. Lonely people have more cortisol, the stress hormone.

Having resources and strategies help caregivers stave off loneliness. Some suggestions:

- Speak up if you're feeling overwhelmed. Let family and friends know that you need them in your life, even though when they call or invite you to join them, you may have to decline. When possible join them for lunch, a drink, or going to a show.
- A "I'm-too-proud-to-ask-for-help" mindset is destructive and doesn't work. Let others help.
- Get respite care when you need a break longer than an hour. Check out what your community has to offer for care of your loved one: day centers, in-home care, or short-term care in a group home. In Ozaukee County, the Aging and Disability Resource Center (262 284-8120 or 262-377-8120) has information available.
- Join a support group, whether in person, by telephone, or online. Google "family caregiving support groups." A place to start: Family Care Alliance (<http://www.caregiving.org/resources/web-resources>), Caregiver Action Network ([www.caregiveraction.org](http://www.caregiveraction.org)), or Today's Caregiver (<http://www.caregiver.com>).
- Attend a Caregivers Coffee offered at three locations in Ozaukee County at three different times each month. Sponsored by the Caregivers Coalition of Ozaukee County, the coffees are casual meetings of those dealing with similar caregiving issues.

In September the groups will meet on **September 2, 2014 (first Tuesday of each month) 6:00-7:30 p.m.**, at The Providence Place, 815 Washington Avenue (Hwy. 60), Grafton; **September 9, 2014 (second Tuesday of each month) 10-11:30 a.m.**, the County Administration Building, room #117, 121 W. Main St., Port Washington. Contact Julie Irvine at 414 333-1168 or [jirvine@marykay.com](mailto:jirvine@marykay.com) for information; and **September 24, 2014 (fourth Wednesday of each month), 10:00-11:30** at Lakefield Adult Day

Center (St. John's Lutheran Church), corner of Lakefield and Port Washington Rds.,  
Grafton.

Lakefield Adult Day Center provides care for loved ones while the  
caregivers attend the coffee there. For more information about any of the Caregiver  
Coffees, contact Barbara Lindholm at (262) 376-4328 or [blindywb2@sbcglobal.net](mailto:blindywb2@sbcglobal.net) or  
Julie Irvine.