

Senior Center can help with Alzheimer's caregiver care

Did you know that every 71 seconds someone new is diagnosed with Alzheimer's disease? This is according to the National Alzheimer's Association.

The second annual Memory Walk will take place today at Whitney Commons Park starting at 9 a.m. We are teaming up to make a difference by raising awareness and funds that will help research through the Alzheimer's Association.

There is not yet a cure for Alzheimer's disease, but research has discovered strategies, therapies and treatments throughout the course of the disease to help maximize the quality of life for all affected.

It is particularly difficult and stressful for families of Alzheimer's patients when they become the caregiver. Families quite often ask the question, "How do I know if my loved one is experiencing symptoms of Alzheimer's?"

The Alzheimer's Foundation of America lists seven warning signs:

1. Memory loss — especially of recent events, names, placement of objects and new information;
2. Confusion — about time and place;
3. Struggling to complete familiar actions — such as brushing teeth or getting dressed;
4. Trouble finding the appropriate words, completing sentences and following directions and conversations;
5. Poor judgment when making decisions;

6. Changes in mood and personality — such as rapid and persistent mood swings, increased suspicions, withdrawal and disinterest in usual activities;

7. Difficulty with complex mental assignments — such as balancing a check book or other tasks involving numbers.

Most often the family physician is the best resource in helping the caregiver and loved one answer some of these questions.

It is usually more stressful for all involved when you don't know what you are dealing with compared to knowing and moving forward in treatment and getting the support you need. There are screenings available, and your physician will be the first place to start.

The Family Caregiver Program at the Sheridan Senior Center, along with many of our other programs, can be a very important resource for you and your loved one. Caregivers often are so busy taking care of their loved ones that they ignore taking care of themselves. That does not help your loved one.

Studies have shown that caregivers of people with Alzheimer's disease face more physical and mental health problems than any other caregivers. Stress is



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a major health hazard. The more tired and stressed you are, the more you put yourself at risk for various illnesses.

Stress can impact your role as a caregiver, leaving you tired, unfocused and possibly irritable. Finding a little bit of time for your-

self each day is very important to your own quality of life.

Being active, following a good diet and getting enough sleep are just a few things you can do for yourself to be a better caregiver.

Let us help you. The Family Caregiver Support Program offers two support groups each week — Monday at 10 a.m. and 5:30 p.m. at the Senior Center.

It is very important to be around other people experiencing some of the same things you are going through — it validates your thoughts and feelings. In our support groups, we have found that a caregiver initially comes to seek support for himself and often finds that he has in turn been a support to others in the group.

During support group, a caregiver can bring his loved one to our Day Break program at no cost and feel confident that his loved one is safe and being well cared for.

Day Break is available five days a week — you (the caregiver) can take a break from your caregiver responsibilities and know that your loved one is in a place where all his needs are being met.

We also provide respite for the caregiver in the home. You may want to take a couple of hours a week and have one of our Certified Nursing Assistants come to your home and stay with your loved one.

In Home respite is another service that is offered through the Family Caregiver Program. It is vital for you, the caregiver, to give yourself time to meet your needs, and when you know your loved one is being well cared for, you are more likely to enjoy your time away.

So come to our support group and let your loved one enjoy the socialization he needs at our Day Break Program.

For more information on our other programs and activities that can help you and your loved one, please give me a call at 672-2240, or stop by for a visit at 211 Smith St.

Don't wait; ask for help and be the best caregiver you can be while maintaining your own health.

Stella Montano is director of the Family Caregiver Program at the Sheridan Senior Center. This program benefits the Sheridan community, as an estimated 25 percent of our population cares for a loved one.

Center Stage is written by friends of the Senior Center for the Sheridan community. It is a collection of insights and stories related to living well at every age.