

Adult day services for dementia patients provide stress relief to family caregivers

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Family caregivers of older adults with dementia are less stressed and their moods are improved on days when dementia patients receive adult day services (ADS), according to Penn State researchers.

"Caregivers who live with and care for someone with dementia can experience extraordinary amounts of stress," said Steven Zarit, professor and head, human development and family studies. "The use of adult day services appears to provide caregivers with a much-needed break that can possibly protect them from the [negative health effects](#) caused by [chronic stress](#)."

The researchers conducted eight daily telephone interviews on consecutive days with 173 [family caregivers](#) of individuals with dementia who use an ADS—a service that is designed to provide social and some health services to adults who need supervised care outside the home during the day. On some of the interview days, the individuals with dementia attended an ADS program. On other days they were with the caregiver most or all of the time. In the daily interviews, the researchers asked the caregivers about the [stressors](#) and positive events they had been exposed to, as well as their mood and health symptoms during the day.

"Multiple daily reports allow us to compare each person to himself or herself on ADS and non-ADS days," said Zarit. "We can then assess if each person shows improvement in stressor exposure, mood and health symptoms on ADS days compared to non-ADS days. This comparison provides a more fundamental indicator of improvement than how that individual might compare to a group average."

Next, the team used multi-level statistical models to analyze the results of the telephone interviews. The results will appear in today's (May 23) issue of *The Gerontologist*.

The researchers found that caregivers had lower exposure to care-related stressors and more positive experiences on days when their family members with dementia used ADS. On these days, caregivers also were exposed to more non-care stressors. Yet the overall effect of the use of adult day services on caregivers was lowered anger and reduced impact of non-care stressors on depressive symptoms.

"ADS days were associated with a small increase in non-care stressors, yet caregivers reacted to high levels of non-care stressors with less depressive mood on ADS days than non-ADS days, so we conclude that the use of ADS has a buffering effect on the relation of non-care stressors on depressive mood," said Zarit. "Overall, our findings demonstrate that stressors on caregivers are partly lowered and mood is improved on days when their relatives attend adult day service programs, which may provide protection against the negative effects of chronic stress associated with caregiving."

Provided by Pennsylvania State University

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