

The Question Alzheimer's Caregivers Ask: "Am I Going Crazy?"

By [Harriet Hodgson](#)

In the early stages of Alzheimer's disease your loved one may live at home. Family caregivers juggle many variables: Medicare/Medicaid regulations, paperwork, ordering prescriptions, providing nutritious meals, providing appropriate physical activities, and keeping a safe environment. You juggle more variables when your loved one moves to Assisted Living and nursing care. What are these variables?

STAGES OF DISEASE. The Alzheimer's Society of Canada describes a person-centered approach in an Internet article titled, "The Progression of Alzheimer's Disease." People have common symptoms of the disease, but the society says the progression of disease varies from person to person. "There is no clear line when one stage ends and another begins." This blurring can make you question your judgement and make you wonder if you are going crazy.

IMPULSIVE BEHAVIOR. People with AD often do impulsive things and Albert is a good example. He was a caring husband and father, held a responsible job until retirement, and was an expert handyman. As his daughter said, "Daddy can fix anything." Then Albert developed Alzheimer's. In the moderate stage of disease he lived at home. When the toilet would not stop running Albert "fixed" it by bashing the lid with a sledge hammer. Thankfully, he missed the tank and did not flood the house. After this incident Albert was transferred to a nursing home that specialized in memory care.

YOUR MEMORIES. Memories of your loved one may skew your judgment. My father-in-law practiced medicine for many years. Despite his forgetfulness we thought we could trust Dad to take his medicine on time. We were wrong. Dad would lose his medicine or forget to take it. He also developed other medical problems. Clearly, Dad needed more medical services than we could provide, so the family moved him to Assisted Living.

RELATIVES' INTERFERENCE. Out of town relatives can drive family caregivers nuts. These relatives are not mean, they are misguided, for they do not do the daily work or track the progression of disease. Forgetful people can rally for a short time. Your sister may come to visit and take your mother on a city tour. When you ask how things went your sister says, "Mom was fine and she had a wonderful time." Then your sister leaves and you are left to deal with mother's confusion and exhaustion.

DAILY VARIATIONS. The Alzheimer's mind is like a damaged compact disc. In the early stages of disease you cannot tell when your loved one's mind will "play" or skip. Nerve cell damage starts with the cells involved in learning and memory, according to the Alzheimer's Association, and "spreads to cells that control every aspect of thinking, judgment, and behavior." Your loved one's daily variations demand more energy and care from you.

If you are an Alzheimer's caregiver you are not going crazy. You are dealing with a disease that kills brain cells. Though being an Alzheimer's caregiver is hard, it is one of the most loving things you will ever do.

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Harriet Hodgson has been a freelance nonfiction writer for 28 years. She is the author of two books on Alzheimer's disease and one on aging. Her recent book, "Smiling Through Your Tears: Anticipating Grief," written with Lois Krahn, MD is available from <http://www.amazon.com>. A five-star review of the book is posted on Amazon. You will find another review on the American Hospice Foundation Web site under the "School Corner" heading.

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