

# BAI BEACON

The Newsletter from Family and Community Services  
Banner Alzheimer's Institute  
www.banneralz.org ▪ (602) 239-6900  
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Banner Alzheimer's Institute

## April: A month to reflect and renew

As everything around us celebrates spring, is there something missing? As you care for a loved one with dementia do you yearn to do something else? Are there days when you find yourself crying "April Showers?"

If you suffer from periodic sadness, it is time to start thinking more about yourself and how to beat the blues. Sometimes it is as simple as focusing on your needs that aren't being met:

Do you yearn for private or "me" time? Try regular doses of:

- A hot relaxing bath with herbal scents to relax.
- A massage.
- A novel by a favorite author.
- A walk outside.
- A trip to the gym.
- A trip to the beauty parlor or a day at the spa.
- Many caregivers will take an extra bedroom and make it their retreat. Men may turn it into a den or workshop. Women may turn it into a room for hobbies or add a daybed and TV where they can relax.

Do you yearn for more time with friends? Call a friend, get some respite, and:

- Suggest lunch out, or a picnic at your place. Read the paper or watch the morning news so you can talk about anything other than dementia.
- Offer to go walking early in the morning or to the gym together.
- Find a coffee group and attend it regularly.
- Make plans to see a movie.
- Go shopping for something that makes you laugh (you don't need to buy). Try on hats or shoes, go to a flea market, or browse antiques.
- Rejoin your card club, or meet with a religious, social or civic group.

Do you get help from your family?

- This IS the time to think about YOUR needs. Ask your family for specific forms of help and allow them to help you.
- If family members are not able to provide the support you need, consider other alternatives. A common caregiver mistake is to "go it alone" when family members do not help. This only worsens anger, fatigue and isolation. Contact community agencies or your religious community.

Everyone has times of discontent and unhappiness, however for most of us these times pass. If you are feeling increasingly sad, especially if it has lasted two weeks, it is time to speak with your primary doctor about treatment for depression. Depression can slow you down, alter your appetite or change your sleeping patterns. Depression can affect your judgment, patience, and temper. It is easily treated. But if left alone, it will only worsen. This is not a sign of weakness but a common reaction to prolonged stress and loss.

## In Caregiving – He who laughs, lasts!

Debbie Harbinson, RN, is a certified laughter leader who teaches that laughter is indeed the best medicine. Laughter can relax tense muscles, reduce stress hormones, increase chemicals that make you happy, and improve circulation, digestion and respiration. It can decrease pain and improve the immune system.

Research tells us that we should laugh 20 minutes per day – even if we have to fake it! Begin each day with a hearty round of "Ho! Ho! Ha! Ha! Ha!" and repeat it several times. Watch a funny movie, cartoon or TV show. Call someone you like to laugh with. Read the "funnies" section of the newspaper. Look for humor in everyday situations. Spend time with children and animals and watch their play. As Mort Walker writes, "Seven days without laughter makes one weak."





## “Ask the Expert”

by Geri Hall, PhD, ARNP

**Dear Geri:** Two days ago I came home from the grocery store and my husband didn't know me! I explained that we had been married a long time but he insisted that while I am Joan, he was married to the “other Joan!” I can't believe he would forget me after 55 years of marriage! After an hour or so it passed. Last night he refused to get in bed with me because, “My wife would kill me if I went to bed with another woman.” Now I am really worried. Will he forget me?  
— “The Other Joan”

**Dear Joan:** This is one of the most difficult things caregivers face. Unfortunately, Alzheimer's disease affects more than memory. It affects both the brain's ability to interpret what the eyes see, and the patient's sense of time. What you are seeing now is called “Capgras syndrome,” named after the French psychiatrist Jean Marie Joseph Capgras, where the patient believes that the caregiver or other family members are imposters. This

may stem from a distorted perception of you, or it may be that he remembers you only as a much younger woman, and has temporarily forgotten what you are like now. These problems begin in moderate to severe dementia and are episodic, occurring mainly when the person is tired, ill, or stressed. They are relieved with rest. You can be pretty confident that his recognition of you will return. Reassuring him that “Joan” will be back soon and that you will keep him safe until then will usually work. As the patient moves into the late stages of the disease, non-recognition can worsen to the point that it is present most of the time. While patients may not be able to identify their caregiver by name or role, most understand that this is a good and loving person who cares for and supports them.

Interestingly, in very late disease many patients develop “windows of lucidity,” where the patient seems normal. During these times patients often reassure their caregivers that they indeed know, love, and appreciate them.

## Our Mission

*To end Alzheimer's disease without losing a generation, to set a new standard of care for patients and their families, and to forge a model of collaboration in biomedical research.*

## BAI Community Library

Did you know that Banner Alzheimer's Institute has a lending library? Our small but comprehensive and growing library features a diverse collection of dementia and caregiving-related books for you and your family members. We feature everything from specific, factual books on Alzheimer's disease to appropriate activities, communication strategies, coping with changes, and more. We also have a selection of caregiving “how to” DVDs. If you wish to check something out, bring the book to our reception area and we will be happy to assist you.

BAI also features a wide selection of **FREE** materials ordered through National Institutes of Health and National Institute on Aging. Straightforward fact sheets on a variety of dementia and caregiving titles are available. Stop by and take a look!

Have you read a book lately that you can recommend to other care partners of someone with a memory problem? If so, let us know and we can look into adding it to our collection. If you would like more information about our library inventory, please contact Jennifer Westlund, MSW at (602) 239-6896 or [jennifer.westlund@bannerhealth.com](mailto:jennifer.westlund@bannerhealth.com) to request a copy of our reading list.

## Beacon Bits

**Did you know that there are resources here at BAI to combat “April Showers?”**

- The BAI Alzheimer Care Partner Support Group meets at 12:30 pm on the first Thursday of the month. Contact Jennifer Westlund for additional information at (602) 239-6896.
- The Caregiver Grief Group meets through Banner Hospice. For information on schedules and location contact the hospice at (480) 497-5535.
- BAI Explorer's Club in May will meet at the Desert Botanical Gardens for a personalized tour! Bring you loved one or come alone for this interactive and informative outing. Call Jennifer Westlund at (602) 239-6896 for payment and registration details.
- MAPS for Care Partners is an all-day, two Saturday workshop scheduled for June 7 and June 21 at Banner Estrella Medical Center, 9201 W. Thomas Road in Phoenix. This series will fill your caregiving “tool bag” with practical ideas you can use at home. For registration and payment information, please call (602) 239-6896.