

Even mild depression puts a burden on Alzheimer's family caregivers

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Caregiving for an Alzheimer's patient is especially burdensome for spousal and family caregivers who at the time of their near and dear one's Alzheimer's diagnosis suffer from depressive symptoms, according to a recent University of Eastern Finland study.

The study analysed the psychological stress of family caregivers during a three-year period following the Alzheimer's [diagnosis](#). The study constitutes part of the ALSOVA project involving 236 persons diagnosed with Alzheimer's disease and their family caregivers. The study participants were voluntarily recruited from the memory disorder clinics of three Finnish central and university hospitals. The patients participating in the study were at the onset diagnosed with a very mild or mild form of Alzheimer's disease.

The results indicate that the heaviest psychological stress was experienced by family caregivers who at the time of diagnosis suffered from [depressive symptoms](#). "The occurrence of even mild depressive symptoms predicted a psychological load on the [family caregiver](#) irrespective of, for example, the progression of the disease," says Researcher Tarja Välimäki of the Department of Nursing Science.

The study also found that the psychological stress of spousal caregivers was greater already at the onset of the study than that of other family caregivers, and that the [psychological stress](#) of spousal caregivers also increased during the follow-up.

According to the study researchers, the results suggest that it is wise to pay attention also to the family caregiver's health at the time of the Alzheimer's diagnosis. "A depression inquiry carried out by, for example, a memory nurse would make it possible to recognise family caregivers who need enhanced support."

The results were published in *Journal of Geriatric Psychiatry and Neurology*.

The ALSOVA project is a multidisciplinary research project ongoing at the University of Eastern Finland and involving researchers from the fields of neurology, nursing science, health economics and psychology.

Provided by University of Eastern Finland

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