Respite Care Is a Key Element of Healthy Caregiving

By Savannah Dahl, CTRS

"Breaks in caregiving are a must. They are as important to health as diet, sleep, rest, and exercise. It's important not to lose sight of your personal needs and interests. Studies show that sacrificing yourself in the care of another and removing pleasurable events from your life can lead to emotional exhaustion, depression, and physical illness. You have a right – even a responsibility – to take some time away from caregiving."
– The Caregiver Helpbook, Powerful Tools for Caregivers

Caring for someone with dementia is an act of commitment and deep love that can come with benefits, like learning new skills or experiencing a sense of fulfillment and purpose. However, it's also emotionally and physically exhausting. The daily responsibilities, emotional stress, and constant vigilance can take a toll on anyone. That's where respite care comes in, not as a sign of giving up, but as a necessary and healthy way to keep going. Respite care provides a temporary break for caregivers, offering essential time to rest, recharge, and tend to personal needs. And it does all of this without compromising the safety and well-being of the person receiving care.

At its core, respite is short-term care provided to the person with dementia (or another individual with functional needs impairments), allowing their primary caregiver temporary relief. Whether for a few hours, a full day, or weeks at a time, respite care is a vital tool in maintaining a healthy caregiving relationship. Although getting a break isn't always easy—and there are certainly barriers to receiving that respite—know that there are different options available, ones that will likely fit the needs of your family.

Types of Respite Care

1. Hired In-Home Care Services
Professional in-home care agencies offer flexible options, ranging from companion visits to overnight stays with nursing-level trained staff. These services may include personal care assistance, medication reminders, or simply companionship, tailored to meet the needs of the individual after a thorough personal health assessment.

2. Companion Visitors and Volunteers
Local nonprofits, faith communities, and private caregivers often offer social visits. These companions may chat, go for walks, assist with errands, or engage in games and activities. Sometimes they will offer transportation to more social options like community centers or group activities. While they may not provide hands-on care, they offer meaningful interaction and allow caregivers a few hours of rest.

3. Adult Day Programs
These centers provide structured activities, meals, personal care, and supervision in a safe environment. Often covered by government waiver programs like Community Access for Disability Inclusion (CADI) or Elderly Waiver (financial eligibility requirements), adult day programs are a great option for social engagement and cognitive stimulation.

4. Group Respite
Offered in community settings, group respite programs focus on social activities in a safe and supervised environment. While they do not usually provide personal care, they give caregivers a valuable break while their loved one engages with peers. These groups tend to feel a lot like a community center and are a fantastic option if someone is still independent in their personal cares. Something unique about The Gathering (Lyngblomsten's group respite program for adults with early- to mid-stage memory loss) is that it gives caregivers an opportunity to engage with their peers during weekly Caregiver Connect support groups.

5. Overnight Respite Stays
Some long-term care communities, such as assisted living or memory care, offer short-term overnight stays. These provide a more comprehensive level of care and are helpful when a caregiver is looking to take a vacation, has a medical emergency or scheduled procedure, or simply needs a longer break. This process requires formal assessment and paperwork, so it's necessary to know specific requirements of the community you're considering as well as what the moving procedure requires for your family.

6. Memory Cafés
These social groups typically last 1–2 hours and are attended by both caregivers and individuals with dementia. Some cafés offer shared activities where everyone participates, while others split into caregiver support groups and separate programming for care receivers. Both formats are a great way to meet and connect with others in the community who are walking a similar path. The best advice and information you can receive on the caregiving journey often comes from those who are right there with you.

Benefits of Respite Care

For caregivers, respite provides time to attend medical appointments, connect with friends and family, run errands, or simply rest. Taking time away helps reduce stress and burnout, which is essential to sustaining long-term caregiving.

For individuals with dementia, respite care offers social engagement, mental stimulation, and a chance to build confidence in a supportive environment. They often return home happier and more relaxed, rejoining a caregiver who is refreshed and more patient.

In the journey of caregiving, respite isn't a luxury, and it isn't selfish—it's a necessity.

To find out about what respite options may be the best fit for you family and strategies you can use to access them, reach out to Lyngblomsten Caregiver Services at caregiving@lyngblomsten.org or (651) 632-5320.