

## Steps for Support During Alzheimer's and Brain Awareness Month

June is Alzheimer's and Brain Awareness Month. According to the Alzheimer's Association, there are currently more than 55 million people across the globe living with Alzheimer's or another form of dementia. The path to better brain health begins with awareness. By learning how to recognize the early signs of dementia and its related incarnations, and understand how best to practice brain-healthy behavior, we can take meaningful steps — for ourselves and those we care about.

While dementia is defined by the Alzheimer's Association as an overall umbrella term that refers to a collective group of "cognitive, functional and behavioral symptoms" which result from more specific diseases, Alzheimer's is the most common example of such diseases, defined generally as a degenerative brain disease caused by damage to nerve cells in the brain which develops gradually over time.

### *Dealing With Diagnoses*

An Alzheimer's or dementia diagnosis can be entirely life-altering — both for the diagnosed individual and their loved ones — and the process of acceptance all around is often challenging and accompanied by difficult emotions such as denial, fear and grief.

In the face of coming to terms with such an overwhelming change, at a time where all parties involved often feel increasingly powerless, it can be helpful to focus instead on the things that do remain within our power, and the positive steps we can take to show support and care to our loved one in their time of need.



### **Consider these recommendations for how best to help and support someone who has been diagnosed with Alzheimer's or dementia:**

- **Establish and maintain a consistent routine.** Those living with this disease often find immense comfort in having activities such as waking up, showering, eating and other everyday tasks at the same regularly scheduled times.
- **Allow them to retain as much independence as possible.** The loss of autonomy can negatively impact the individual's confidence and self-esteem. Depending on the stage of their diagnosis and the advice of their physician, try to allow them to do as much as possible for themselves, while still making safety a priority.
- **Remember that mood swings are common, and remain solution-oriented.** Confusion from the progression of dementia can manifest as a whole range of emotions, including anger and aggression in the evenings in particular: a phenomenon otherwise known as "sundowning," which can be incredibly alarming if you are unprepared for it. Minimize distress by attempting to meet all of the individual's basic needs, avoiding over-stimulation, and trying never to force them to do anything they don't feel well enough to do.

*continued on back*

- **Ensure safety in their living space.** Identify any potential hazards or risks, and pay attention to warning signs (such as restlessness) that may indicate an inclination to wander.
- **Prioritize compassion in all conversations and interactions.** Overcome the instinct to succumb to frustration when your loved one forgets or misunderstands. If they say something that is incorrect, deeply consider just acknowledging what they are saying. You can ask yourself if you really feel the need to correct them — what will doing so actually accomplish? It may do more harm than good, and they may not have the capacity to understand anyway. Be as gentle and reassuring as possible.
- **Encourage them to maintain their sense of self.** An Alzheimer's or dementia diagnosis is often followed by doubt regarding the

individual's overall purpose in life, and as the disease presents new and ever-evolving challenges, it can get harder and harder for the person to feel connected with their identity. Urge them to stay involved in the activities and hobbies they have always enjoyed, consider activities you could spend time doing together, or find ways to connect them with other people living with the disease so that they can see first-hand what steps others are taking to carry on an active and engaged lifestyle post-diagnosis.

It's crucial to recognize that this process will not be simple, nor linear. Research shows that caregivers of individuals living with Alzheimer's tend to undergo a diverse set of challenges, including burnout and exhaustion, making it paramount to practice deliberate self-compassion and ask for help as soon as you feel you need it.

Perhaps most important, though, is consistently reminding yourself that, while there is immense value in having the foresight to plan ahead for future care, we must also remember to focus on being there, spending quality time, in the present moment together.

"14 Ways to Help Someone With Alzheimer's," Reena Gottesman, M.D., [hackensackmeridianhealth.org](https://hackensackmeridianhealth.org), July 12, 2023.

"About Alzheimer's," CDC, [cdc.gov](https://cdc.gov), Accessed May 9, 2025.

"Accepting the Diagnosis," Alzheimer's Association, [alz.org](https://alz.org), Accessed May 9, 2025.

"Dementia vs. Alzheimer's Disease: What Is the Difference?" Alzheimer's Association, [alz.org](https://alz.org), Accessed May 9, 2025.

"Explain the Experience of Family Caregivers Regarding Care of Alzheimer's Patients: A Qualitative Study," Hadis Ashrafzadeh et al., *Frontiers in Psychology*, June 23, 2021.

"How to Help a Loved One With Alzheimer's or Dementia," Victoria Pelham, [cedars-sinai.org](https://cedars-sinai.org), June 14, 2023.

"June is Alzheimer's & Brain Awareness Month," Alzheimer's Association, [alz.org](https://alz.org), Accessed May 9, 2025.

"Tips for Caregivers and Families of People With Dementia," [alzheimers.gov](https://alzheimers.gov), [alzheimers.gov](https://alzheimers.gov), Accessed May 9, 2025.

"Understanding and supporting a person with dementia," Alzheimer's Society, [alzheimers.org.uk](https://alzheimers.org.uk), June 27, 2022.

## Snackable, Packable Savory Summer Muffins

Prep time: 15 minutes  
Cook time: 35 minutes  
Makes 12 muffins

### DRY INGREDIENTS

- 3 cups (375g) all-purpose flour or gluten-free flour
- ¼ cup (12g) nutritional yeast or cheddar cheese
- 1 tablespoon baking powder
- ½ teaspoon baking soda
- 1 tablespoon dried Italian herbs
- 2 teaspoons garlic powder (alternative: onion powder)
- ½ teaspoon salt

### WET INGREDIENTS

- 1 ¼ cups (315g) dairy-free milk (alternative: water)
- ½ cup (125g) olive oil
- 1 tablespoon apple cider vinegar (alternatives: lemon juice or white vinegar)
- 1 cup (150g) grated zucchini (1 small zucchini)
- 1 cup (100g) grated carrot (1 medium carrot)
- 1 cup (120g) red bell pepper, finely chopped
- ½ cup (15g) baby spinach leaves, finely chopped

### TO DECORATE (OPTIONAL)

- 3 tablespoons (25g) raw pumpkin seeds (pepitas)

Serving: one muffin, Calories: 224kcal, Carbohydrates: 27g, Protein: 4g, Fat: 11g, Sodium: 292mg, Fiber: 2g, Sugar: 1g  
Adapted from [rainbownourishments.com](https://rainbownourishments.com).

### INSTRUCTIONS

- Prep:** Preheat your oven to 350°F. Line a 12-cup muffin tray.
- Make the batter:** In a large bowl, whisk together the dry ingredients. Add the wet ingredients and veggies; mix until combined with no dry lumps. The batter will be thick.
- Fill the tray:** Spoon the batter into muffin cups, filling almost to the top to form a small mound. Optional: Sprinkle pumpkin seeds (pepitas) on top.
- Bake:** Bake for 30 to 35 minutes, or until a toothpick comes out clean.
- Cool:** Let the muffins cool in the tray for five minutes, then transfer them to a rack to cool completely.
- Serve and store:** Enjoy the muffins at room temperature or slightly warmed, plain or with vegan butter or avocado. Store the muffins in an airtight container:
  - Room temp: two days
  - Fridge: five days
  - Freezer: one month (Bring the muffins to room temp before serving.)