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## **TIPS: CARING FOR THE ADULT CAREGIVER** *Research Shows Occupational Therapy Practitioners “Uniquely Qualified” to Help Those Caring for Older Adults*

**Bethesda, MD** — Caring for an older adult can be rewarding and fulfilling but can also place great physical, emotional and financial demands on those who take care of them. In fact, a recent issue of the *Journal of Immunology* compared Alzheimer’s caregivers to non-caregivers, finding that caregivers aged between four and eight years faster than non-caregivers. In light of these statistics, and in recognition of November as both **National Alzheimer’s Disease Awareness Month** and **National Family Caregivers Month**, the **American Occupational Therapy Association** (AOTA) is offering tips for caring for the adult caregiver.

Research recently published in the *American Journal of Geriatric Psychiatry* tested an occupational therapy home intervention, the Tailored Activity Program (TAP), that systematically evaluates and tailors activities to individual capabilities and trains families in setting up and using activities in daily care. TAP reduced behaviors that trigger nursing home placement and the amount of time families spent supervising and providing care.

“Our research shows that occupational therapists play a critical role in the care of individuals with dementia and their family caregivers,” said Laura N. Gitlin, Ph.D., director of the Jefferson Center for Applied Research on Aging and Health and professor in the Department of Occupational Therapy at Thomas Jefferson University. “Occupational therapy practitioners are uniquely qualified to evaluate individual capabilities, engage individuals with dementia in activities, help families learn specific communication, task and environmental simplification strategies and to take care of themselves.”

Laurel Cargill Radley, MS, OTR, associate director of professional affairs at AOTA, adds, “Occupational therapists can help individuals and their families promote or maximize independence, safety and function.”

Occupational therapy practitioners recommend adult caregivers:

1. **Join a therapy or discussion group** for caregivers of older adults.
2. **Share the responsibility** of caring for an older adult.
3. **Ask others for help.**
4. **Develop a schedule** that distributes caregiving responsibility.
5. **Consider adult daycare** or home health aides to provide occasional breaks to full-time caregivers.
6. **Create moments of joy throughout the day** by participating in pleasurable activities.

Additional caregiver resources can be found on the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services’ (CMS) new Web site, [www.medicare.gov/caregivers](http://www.medicare.gov/caregivers).

Founded in 1917, the **American Occupational Therapy Association** (AOTA) represents the interests and concerns of more than 36,000 occupational therapists, assistants and students nationwide. The Association educates the public and advances the profession of occupational therapy by providing resources, setting standards including accreditations and serving as an advocate to improve health care. Based in Bethesda, Md., AOTA’s major programs and activities are directed toward promoting the professional development of its members and assuring consumer access to quality services so patients can maximize their individual potential. For more information, go to [www.aota.org](http://www.aota.org).