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ADULT DAY CARE SERVICES SIGNIFICANTLY REDUCE THE STRESS LEVELS OF FAMILY CAREGIVERS OF OLDER ADULTS WITH DEMENTIA

In the first known study to clearly demonstrate that Adult Day Services (ADS) is effective in helping reduce stress on family caregivers, Penn State researchers have determined stress is reduced by an average of 66% in caregivers who use adult day care services.

Steven Zarit, PhD, professor and head, department of Human Development and Family Studies, Penn State, a noted researcher, headed up the team effort. The team used daily self-reports of subjective distress and health symptoms from care-related and non-care stressors paired with biomarkers obtained from caregiver's saliva samples provided at scheduled times during each day. Assays were obtained for 3 key biomarkers with implications for health: cortisol, alpha-amylase and dehydroepiandrosterone-sulfate (DHEA-S). Cortisol is a hormone produced by stress.

The team evaluated the cortisol levels of 150 caregivers who began the use of adult day services. The researchers reported their results online in the Journals of Gerontology Series B: Psychological and Social Sciences 10.1093/geronb/gbr030 June 2011.

- Family caregivers experienced 66% less care-related stress on days that their relative used ADS compared to days they did not use ADS.
- Caregivers reported that their relative appeared more alert and easier to manage after spending the day at an ADS program and that their relative benefited from the stimulation and social interactions at the programs.
- ADS use improved sleep and behavior in participants which related to positive changes in well-being among their family caregivers.

"One way of alleviating that stress is through the use of an adult day care center, which allows them a predictable break from caregiving responsibilities...The changes we have seen are as large as you'd get with medication, but with no side effects," Zarit added.