

Women doing it for themselves

Mother's Day takes on a special significance for Muriel Munson. She's had many close female friends in her 79 years, and she always got along well with her mother. But as she heads into her 80s with a diagnosis of Alzheimer's disease, Muriel wishes she had a daughter to accompany her on her journey.



"When I cook something and can't remember, I could phone a daughter and say 'Do you remember what I used to do?' But a son -- forget it," she says with a knowing laugh.

While her three boys are "wonderful," only a daughter would tell her honestly whether her clothes matched, she says. "I wish I had a daughter so I could say to her 'Do I have too much eye makeup on? I don't want to look like a clown'" Muriel jokes.

Women account for up to 75% per cent of the half million Canadians who currently live with Alzheimer's disease. The fact that women live longer on average than men partly explains this high number. [Menopausal women are also more vulnerable as their estrogen levels begin to decline.](#) Estrogen directly impacts regions of the brain that are responsible for memory.

Women helping women

Early diagnosis and a supportive family or friends help women better manage their disease and plan ahead for their future care. So it's no surprise that as a peer facilitator for an early stage support group at the [Alzheimer Society of Niagara Region](#), Muriel seeks out the women. She focuses on getting them to open up, share their experiences and lean on each other.

When a woman from her group recently arrived with a smile on her face, wearing a vibrant purple blouse, Muriel was so happy to see her upbeat attitude that she gave her a big hug.

"You get such a reward out of seeing them come along," she says.

Laughter as medicine

While Muriel is clear-eyed about the progression of her disease, she refuses to take herself too seriously.

"I made a stupid mistake at Sears once. I gave them my health card instead of my Sears card," she said. "I laughed and told the cashier to blame it on my Alzheimer's."

"She said to me, 'I wish my mother-in-law was like you. She's so miserable because she has it.' Well, you know my time is short. You don't make people around you miserable."