Physical activity associated with slower cognitive decline in people with high levels of tau protein

Voices of the Last Frontier

Caring for Jerry: Sharon’s Story

Support us when you
Pick. Click. Give.
Save the Date!

Alaskans are ready to reconnect, and we will. Join us **May 7, 2022**, we are Amblin’ in-person in Anchorage at **O’Malley’s On the Green**, and virtually across Alaska, for our 18th Amblin’ for Alzheimer’s walk.

Amblin’ is a friendly, non-competitive fundraising walk for all ages.

Look for details coming soon at **www.alzalaska.org/amblin**.
Dear Friends,

Welcome to the New Year! Already our days are growing longer, and that alone brings smiles.

We’re tremendously grateful for the generosity of our donors who helped make the 2021 Year End Campaign the most successful in recent years. Alzheimer’s Resource of Alaska (ARA) surpassed its expectations in this drive. We had been planning to participate in the Mayor’s Charity Ball in February as one of the selected charity beneficiaries. But the event organizers concluded that the gala event would be better postponed until the current COVID surge abates. The event is now rescheduled for October 8 and we’ll be front and center. Before then, we’ll be back outdoors for our springtime Amblin’ for Alzheimer’s walk. I’m looking forward to the chance to reconnect with so many of you in person, and to personally introduce you to Joanne Proefrock who is our new development director.

The Alaska Legislature has returned to Juneau to set about its work. Our primary message to legislators this year is to ask them to include a cost of living increase to Older Americans Act programs in the state. There haven’t been adjustments in many, many years—while our costs as providers continue to climb. The result is fewer services even as our senior population grows. The programs are not only ones ARA provides, like the Family Caregiver and Senior In-Home (case management), but also congregate meals, home delivered meals, transportation services and adult day programs. If you speak to your own legislators this session, please share your thoughts with them on the matter.

Wishing you all the best as the sun gets higher in the sky,
Sincerely,

Pam

Pamela Kelley
Executive Director
Sharon’s Story: Caring for Jerry

“Dementia tends to strip away how we want to appear to others, with Jerry I now get to see the whole person and that is rare.”

By: ARA Editorial Team

Years ago, when I was just starting my career as an intern principal in the Anchorage School District, I met a wonderful teacher, Rebecca “Becky” Ann Clement. Becky, along with her sister Beverly, were the founders of the Alzheimer’s Resource of Alaska. She would often share her daily experiences caring for her mother with Alzheimer’s with me. Little did I know, that one day in the future, I would also be a caregiver to my husband, Jerry, who is living with Alzheimer’s.

Jerry and I have been happily married for 33 years. We met in Delta Junction where Jerry was Assistant Superintendent at the district, and I was a single mother with three young children to support. Jerry helped me get a job at the school library and encouraged me to finish up my teaching degree. We became good friends, and after a few years, we fell in love and became official partners in marriage. Over the years our friendship and love have only deepened.

During the early years of our marriage, Jerry was always my biggest supporter. While I worked, he helped take care of the home front so I could pursue my career as a teacher. He was a steady and loving presence for the family, attending games and activities, packing lunches and keeping things on an even keel. Jerry always loved serving as an educator throughout Alaska – from the North Slope, Barrow, Point Hope, and many other rural places in-between. He always loved the people he met and worked with, and they felt the same about him. These are some of the special memories that spark joy and bring back highlights of his life before dementia.

Later, we moved to Wasilla and I made the daily commute to Anchorage as a school principal – a job I loved. In 2003, Jerry had two transient ischemic attacks (TIA’s), or in other words a brief stroke-like attack that happens suddenly. I started noticing some cognitive decline but didn’t pay much attention to the symptoms at first. After his last TIA, he received a diagnosis of Alzheimer’s and

(Cont. on next page)
vascular dementia, which is also referred to as mixed dementia. This is when I started noticing a real decline in his thinking abilities.

About eight years ago, I gave up my career so I could devote more time to Jerry’s care. This is a decision I do not regret because it has taught me so much about myself and my husband. I’ve learned so many lessons about life. The biggest lesson is the importance of patience and humility, and the gift of helping someone with kindness and love. I’ve learned so much from my husband - his ability to meet the challenges of Alzheimer’s with such grace and calmness. Dementia tends to strip away some of our learned behaviors or how we want to appear to others, with Jerry I now get to see the whole person and that is rare. He can still make me laugh and his manners are still intact. He is still the gentleman he was the day I married him and, to this day, he insists on walking along the right side of me.

About six years ago we sold our family home and relocated to Raven Landing, an independent living community in Fairbanks. For the three years, we lived there; it provided Jerry friendship, activities, social events, and ways to be active in the community - all in a safe environment. Not too long ago, I had to make the difficult decision to place

(Cont. on next page)
Engaging in high or medium levels of physical activity was associated with slower rates of cognitive decline in people with high or low levels of tau, compared to those with little physical activity. Led by researchers from the Rush University Medical Center, the findings were published in JAMA Network Open on Aug. 11. The researchers noted that measuring levels of tau, a protein that is a hallmark of Alzheimer’s disease, in the blood could help identify people who might benefit from early intervention to slow cognitive decline.

In people living with Alzheimer’s, abnormal accumulation of tau builds up into tangles in the brain.

Physical activity associated with slower cognitive decline in people with high levels of tau protein

October 14, 2021 — NIH.com National Institute on Aging

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In people living with Alzheimer’s, abnormal accumulation of tau builds up into tangles in the brain.
Higher levels of tau are associated with cognitive decline and an increase in memory and thinking problems. Research has shown that physical activity may help slow cognitive decline, but it was unknown if physical activity rates were associated with slow cognitive decline in people who have high levels of tau.

A team of researchers used data from 1,159 older adults who took part in a large study called the Chicago Health and Aging Project (CHAP) between 1993 and 2012. CHAP researchers assessed cognitive function using various tests, asked participants about their physical activity, and collected blood samples from the participants, who did not have Alzheimer’s at the start of the study. In 2019, researchers measured tau concentrations in the blood samples, which had been frozen, and compared rates of cognitive decline among people with high and low tau concentrations and high, medium, and low physical activity levels.

The researchers found that, among participants with high tau concentrations, those who had reported medium levels of physical activity had a 58% slower rate of cognitive decline than participants with low physical activity levels. Those who reported high physical activity levels had a 41% slower rate of cognitive decline than those with low self-reported physical activity levels. For participants with low tau concentrations, those with high physical activity levels had significantly slower cognitive decline than those with medium or low physical activity levels.

The study had some limitations. It included only white and African American participants, and it measured the duration but not the intensity of physical activity. The researchers also note that the rate of cognitive decline was sometimes lower among participants with medium physical activity levels than among those with high physical activity levels; the reasons for this variation warrant further study.

The findings suggest that measuring proteins — such as tau — in the blood could help identify people who would benefit from increased physical activity or other behavior changes that could help slow cognitive decline. Measuring such proteins could also help future studies measure the benefits of behavior changes in people who are at higher risk of Alzheimer’s.

Music evokes emotion in people living with even the most advanced stages of Alzheimer’s disease. Neurologist Oliver Sacks says that, “emotion can bring with it memory... it brings back the feeling of life when nothing else can.” By pairing music with every day activities, people can develop a rhythm that helps them to recall the memory of that activity, improving cognitive ability over time.

Voices of the Last Frontier is a chorus program for those living with dementia, their care partners and community volunteers. Join us weekly for an engaging hour of singing, group activities and sharing our stories on Zoom.

Our winter session begins January 7, meeting every Friday for one hour sessions through February 25. Join us for one session or attend all eight.

We are so grateful for our community volunteers who have participated and contributed to the chorus this past year:

Kyle Lindsey & his South High School music class
Mary Schallert and her summer camp music students
Miriah Phelps
Anna Cometa
Lena Gonzalez
Zach Akins
John & Barb Angaiak
9th Army Band
Linda Shepard
Ken Helander
Scott Taylor
Carrie Gruhn
His Hands Aglow musical sign-language group

2019 Voices of the Last Frontier concert - photography by David LaBelle
Volunteer & In-Kind Supporters
between October 1 - December 31, 2021

Absolutely Miller Events
AK Bark
Alaska Big Bites
Guide Service
Alaska Blooms
Peony Farm
Alaska Raceway Park
Alaska Sealife Center
Alyeska Resort
Anchorage Log
Cabin Quilters
Anchorage Wine House
Anchorage Yoga & Cycle
Arctic Pups
Aurora Limousine LLC.
Bellreese Photography
Cathy Brenner
John & Jackie Brunton*
Bush Family
Caffé D’arte
Michelle Cassano
Chena Hot Springs
Copper River Fleece
David Jensen Photography
Denali Zipline Tours
Tom & Ann Farris
Gayla Designs
Glacier Jet Ski Adventures
Harbor 360 Hotel
Walter Hays
& JoAnn Shore
J-Rod’s Guide Service
Keebler Family
Kayhi Class of 1977
Barb Kehrberg
Kincaid Grill
Krav Maga
Sharon Lake
Majestic View
Bed and Breakfast
Penaki Pottery
Premier Alaska Tours
Ruth Quinlan
George Rhyneer &
Marilyn McKay
Sal’s New York Grill &
Catering,
Sal & Nicki Addonisio
J. Scott
Rhonda Scott
Seattle Kraken
Mark &
Mae Ann Smith
Linda Spencer
Spoonline Bistro
Connie & Steve Sumida
June Takagi
Talkeetna Inn
The Alaska Club
UAF Museum
of the North
Rori A. Van Nortwick*

In Honor & Memory of

Carolyn Ward
JoAnn & Tim Bantz

Bonnie
Robert J. Bohnert

Delbert Cederberg
Davis Constructors

Dorothy Magette
John & Jackie Brunton*

Phyllis Brown Burke
Eric & Joanna Croft

Quentin McCubrey
Dimond High Faculty Fund

Delbert Cederberg
F & W Construction Co.

Charlie Fahl
Ruth Fahl

Mary Boudard
Janice A. Ford

Delbert Cederberg
Kathleen Grace

Dorothy Hugg
Wayne Holmes &
Jonell M Snook-Holmes*

Irvin “Skip” Joy
Jack & Annette

Ronald A. Jackson
Peggy A. Jackson

Irvin “Skip” Joy
Georgann Joy

Susan R. Pozzi
Bruce Pozzi

Audrey Roberts
Pamela R. Kelley

Jay N. Kinard
Lucinda H. Kinard

Judge Jay Justin Ripley
Iris Palmer & Ray Shirley

Layne
Carolyn Ratcliffe

Irvin “Skip” Joy
Katherine & Mark Schmeling

Patricia Versnick
Rhonda Scott

Maria Elena Walsh
Michael Walsh

John Wilson
Elizabeth M. Wilson

Rebecca Ann Clement
JoAnn & Tim Bantz

Dr. Perry D. & Susan G. Melvin
John & Susan Donohue
John & Eleanor Kelley
Howard Mizushima

* Denotes current or former ARA board member. Other donors are noted in our Annual Report.
Caregiver Support Groups throughout Alaska

Groups are free to join. Registration required. ARA logo indicates an ARA facilitator.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statewide Telephone Support Group</th>
<th>Dial in using: 1-877-216-1555 Code 927989# No registration required</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Every 1st Saturday, 1–2:00 pm</td>
<td>For additional info, contact Gay Wellman, 822-5620 or 800-478-1080</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Every 3rd Wednesday, 1–2:00 pm</td>
<td>For additional info, contact Debbie Chulick, 561-3313 or 800-478-1080</td>
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<tr>
<th>Statewide Care Partner Support</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Every 2nd &amp; 4th Tuesday, 1-2:30 pm</td>
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<tr>
<td>Every 2nd &amp; 4th Saturday 10:30am-12 pm</td>
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<tr>
<td>CONTACT: Gay Wellman, <a href="mailto:gwellman@alzalaska.org">gwellman@alzalaska.org</a> 822-5620 or 800-478-1080</td>
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<tr>
<th>Grieving Caregiver Support</th>
<th>CONTACT: Gay Wellman, <a href="mailto:gwellman@alzalaska.org">gwellman@alzalaska.org</a> 822-5620 or 800-478-1080</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Every 1st &amp; 3rd Thursday, 1-2:30 pm</td>
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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Anchorage</th>
<th>CONTACT: Debbie Chulick, 561-3313</th>
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<tr>
<td>Every 4th Thursday, 5:30–7 pm</td>
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<tr>
<th>Eagle River</th>
<th>CONTACT: Debbie Chulick, 561-3313</th>
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<tr>
<td>Every 2nd Thursday, 5:30–7 pm</td>
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<tr>
<th>Fairbanks</th>
<th>CONTACT: Joan Adams, 452-2277</th>
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<tr>
<td>Every 2nd Tuesday, 4:30–6 pm</td>
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<tr>
<td>Every 3rd Tuesday, 1:00–2:30 pm</td>
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<tr>
<th>Homer</th>
<th>CONTACT: Pam Hooker, 235-7655</th>
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<td>Call for current schedule</td>
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<tr>
<th>Juneau / Southeast AK</th>
<th>CONTACT: Aimee 463-6177</th>
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<td>Call for current schedule</td>
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<tr>
<th>Ketchikan</th>
<th>CONTACT: Bernice, 255-8080</th>
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<td>Call for current schedule</td>
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<tr>
<th>Kodiak</th>
<th>CONTACT: 486-6181</th>
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<tr>
<td>Every 4th Thursday, 12:30–1:30 pm</td>
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<tr>
<th>Mat-Su Valley</th>
<th>CONTACT: Janice Downing 746-3413</th>
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<td>Every 2nd Tuesday, 1:30–3 pm</td>
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<tr>
<th>Seward</th>
<th>CONTACT: 244-5604</th>
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<tr>
<td>Every 4th Thursday, 1–2 pm</td>
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<tr>
<th>Sitka</th>
<th>CONTACT: 747-4600</th>
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<td>Call for current schedule</td>
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<tr>
<th>Soldotna</th>
<th>CONTACT: Dani Kebschull, 262-1280</th>
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<tr>
<td>Every 2nd and Last Tuesday, 1–3 pm</td>
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<tr>
<td>Every 1st Tuesday, 1–2 pm</td>
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<tr>
<th>Sutton, Palmer, Chickaloon, Glacier View</th>
<th>CONTACT: Kim Jung, 746-3413</th>
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<tr>
<td>Every 1st Friday, 10–11:30 am</td>
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<tr>
<th>Talkeetna, Willow, Trapper Creek</th>
<th>CONTACT: Kim Jung, 746-3413</th>
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<tr>
<td>Every 1st Monday, 10–11:30 am</td>
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Support groups provide a way for people with a common experience to help and learn from each other. They can be an important source of social and emotional support, as well as a great way to see what works for others and learn about local services.

Most groups are currently available statewide over the phone or via Zoom. For this reason most people find it helpful to identify groups with days and times that work best with your schedule regardless of location.

You might also be interested in joining our Facebook Caregiver Support Group. This is a closed group and you will need to request access.

Mind Matters is an education and support program for individuals with early memory loss.

This program goes beyond the confines of a traditional support group and offers participants a chance to share experiences while engaging in a variety of meaningful activities including volunteering, gardening, writing and listening to guest speakers.
Classes and events are available statewide, online via Zoom. All classes listed below require registration.

**Classes & Events around the State**

**Classes and events are available statewide, online via Zoom.**

- **Vascular Dementia**
  - Tue, 1/25, 1pm-2:30pm
  - [REGISTER HERE](#)

- **Understanding Supported Decision Making Agreements for Seniors**
  - Mon, 2/21, 1pm-2:30pm
  - [REGISTER HERE](#)

- **Art Links**
  - 1-1:45pm
  - To register contact: Janice Downing at 746-3413 or email: jdowning@alzalaska.org

- **SAVVY CAREGIVER**
  - Provides caregivers skills and knowledge needed to provide the highest level of care for loved ones, and themselves.
  - **Screening & Pre-registration required**
  - To register contact: Ann Farris at 907-561-3313 or email: afarris@alzalaska.org

- **Memories Caf**
  - To register contact Ann Farris at 907-561-3313 or email: afarris@alzalaska.org
  - Thursday, 1/13, 1pm
  - Thursday, 2/10, 1pm
  - Thursday, 3/10, 1pm

- **Art Links**
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  - To register contact: Janice Downing at 746-3413 or email: jdowning@alzalaska.org

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- **Mind Works**
  - Mon & Wed, 1/17-4/11, 1 pm - 2 pm

- **Professional Webinars**
  - Questions or registration assistance, contact: Amber Smith: 586-6044 or asmith@alzalaska.org

- **Person-Centered Care**
  - Tuesday, 1/18, 12 pm - 1:00pm
  - [REGISTER HERE](#)

- **The GEMS®: Using Skills That Make a Difference**
  - Tuesday, 2/15, 12 pm - 1:00pm
  - [REGISTER HERE](#)

- **Communication Tips: Beyond the Basics**
  - Tuesday 3/15, 12 pm - 1:00pm
  - [REGISTER HERE](#)

- **Mind Aerobics™**
  - 12-week course meeting twice per week
  - *SV%PEWOERW[SVVM.HEFSYX1]Q5W[LS][ERXSOIITXILMVQRMH* XERH\KHH*

- **Mind Sharpener™**
  - Tue & Thur, 1/4–3/31, 10-11am

- **Mind Works™**
  - Mon & Wed, 1/17–4/11, 1 pm - 2 pm

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