

Making Memories at Memory Cafes

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Caregivers often say that one of the hardest parts of dealing with dementia, Alzheimer's, and other [memory loss](#) is the absence of the normal interactions they once had in a couple or parent/child relationship. Instead, these days are full of difficult and tedious tasks.

Memory cafés are a break from the routine. They're an informal place for caregivers and their loved ones to gather for conversation, companionship, [games](#) and activities, [musical entertainment](#), perhaps, and an occasional outing. Some have educational resources, such as an Alzheimer's expert, but others are purely social.

More than anything, they aim to restore normalcy-and fun-to [caregivers](#) and their loved ones with mild cognitive impairment or early [Alzheimer's](#). The other obvious plus is that it's a place to go where others are dealing with similar issues.

"What people say they love about the cafés," says Lori La Bey, founder of the advocacy group [Alzheimer's Speaks](#) and a facilitator at two memory cafes in the St. Paul/ Minneapolis area, "is that it's the one place to have fun and feel safe where they don't have to apologize, be embarrassed or explain. They can have friends again and be a couple."

Rather than focus on the disease or be a place to vent, cafés are an opportunity for caregivers and loved ones to do what they're able, not unable, to do together. And that's an important point.

The cafés may take place in a church, senior center, museum, hospital, public library, adult day care center or, yes, a real café. They typically last 1.5-2 hours and occur monthly, twice a month or more.

It's hard to know how many there are nationwide, but experts guess 60 to 80. The concept originated in the Netherlands, then spread to England in 2000. In the U.K, the government picks up the tab for them. Here, most cafés are started by grassroots groups and staffed by volunteers. (The [Alzheimer's Association](#) does partner with a few groups.) The first Alzheimer's café debuted in Santa Fe, N.M., in 2008.

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