Between 2010 and 2012, there has been a rapid increase from 29% to 39% in the U.S. adult population that is providing critical care to a family member on an ongoing, daily basis. Research shows that providing care to a family member can, at times, lead to psychological and physical health problems. Individuals who care for family members with Alzheimer’s disease or other dementia-related disorders are the most affected.

The goal of the Fitness, Aging, and Stress Study, or FAST Study for short, is to explore the benefits of regular physical activity to adult women and men providing care to family members who have been diagnosed with Alzheimer’s disease or dementia.

We are examining whether increasing aerobic exercise levels can increase cellular markers of health, improve exercise capacity and blood pressure, and improve psychological well-being over six months in currently inactive caregiving adults.

We are seeking 80 men and women between the ages of 50 and 75 who provide care to a family member with Alzheimer’s disease or a dementia-related disorder on an ongoing, daily basis. Caregiving adults who participate in the study will receive a free 6-month membership to their local YMCA.

Caregivers who are in the exercise intervention group will be asked to increase their activity levels to 150 minutes a week, as recommended by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, for 6 full months. Caregivers in the control group will wait 6 months to receive their gym membership and will be asked to maintain their current levels of activity. All participants will complete surveys, have their blood drawn at UCSF’s clinic, and undergo a fitness test at the beginning of the study and 6 months later when the study is over.