

Practical Suggestions for Everyday Concerns

It's no secret that caregivers for people who have Alzheimer's disease have their hands full. Here are some practical suggestions for caregivers.

Communication:

Logic and reasoning may not work. Apologize for having such a hard time understanding and show them what you want rather than speaking it.

Fitness:

Physical exercise can relieve stress and is very important to keep muscles and joints working. Walking and stretching are good exercises for both the caregiver and the person with Alzheimer's.

Cueing:

Use illustrated signs for rooms in the home. If the person with dementia has trouble understanding verbal instructions, perform the task you are requesting. He/she may be able to mimic your behavior

Spirituality:

If spirituality was an important part of a person's life before diagnosis, make sure to continue to offer outlets for spiritual expression.

Over-Reliance/Shadowing:

As vision fails and the person with Alzheimer's disease becomes more uncertain, she may cling to you for support. Reassure her of your presence, give her something to do where she can see you, and don't be afraid to ask for support from others.

Undressing:

Undressing inappropriately may be a cue that the person with Alzheimer's is anxious or physically uncomfortable. Address the reason for the discomfort (e.g. too hot or too cold) and divert the person's attention.

Paranoia:

A person with Alzheimer's disease may put a beloved object away to secure it, forget where it is, and then believe it was stolen. Get to know his/her hiding places and help look for lost objects.

Falls:

Falls often occur due to poor vision, unsteady gait, and changes in depth perception. Remove unnecessary obstacles, secure rugs, and don't rearrange furniture unless it is necessary. Never leave your loved one alone if he can't respond appropriately in case of emergency.

Aggression:

Stay calm and avoid physical confrontation. Notice nonverbal cues that indicate increasing agitation. Remove potentially harmful items from the immediate environment. Consult the family physician if the behavior continues to get worse. Develop a safety plan, such as calling emergency services if necessary.

The Importance of Respite

Respite, a "time out" from caregiving, allows the person caring for someone with Alzheimer's disease or other forms of dementia a chance to focus on their own health and well-being. Research indicates that caregivers who use respite have a lower risk of anxiety and depression, and are more effective caregivers. Alzheimer's New Jersey's Respite Care and Wellness Program provides financial assistance and education about the importance of respite in the life of an Alzheimer's caregiver.

Alzheimer's New Jersey®

Fabrication:

When memory fails, the person tries to fill in the gaps with ideas or memories that may not be accurate. This behavior is not malicious, but a part of the disease process.

Incontinence:

Incontinence may occur due to forgetfulness or inability to control one's bladder or bowel. Make more frequent trips to the bathroom. Use adult incontinence briefs. Fidgeting is a common indicator of discomfort or physical need. Put signs on bathroom doors that include a picture of a toilet.

Wandering and Safety:

Assess the reason for wanting to leave (e.g., looking for a bathroom, looking for "home"). Put curtains over the doorway and close the curtains. Remove knobs from the stove when not in use. Put knives and harmful chemicals out of sight and reach.

Bathing:

When bathing is difficult, don't force it. Try again later. Be sure the room temperature and water temperature are comfortable. Be aware of any pain you may be inadvertently causing.

Driving:

You may request that the doctor write a note stating that the person is no longer able to drive. It may be necessary to hide the keys or disable/remove the car. There are driver evaluation centers throughout New Jersey that can also assist.

Rushing:

Simply put, leave early and allow more time. Trying to rush will only heighten anxiety for both the caregiver and the person with Alzheimer's disease.

Control:

Give it up. You must be flexible in your desire to meet goals. Educate yourself about the disease. Stick to a regular routine. Learn to predict behavior problems whenever possible.

Achievement:

Celebrate small achievements. Set expectations at a level the person with Alzheimer's can perform well to help them feel a sense of accomplishment.

Attitude:

Your attitude and facial expression will likely be mimicked by the person with Alzheimer's disease. Take a minute to calm yourself and prepare for every interaction.

Reminiscing:

Get creative about using every possible moment for reminiscing. Use music that is familiar to them, pictures, art and storytelling to spark memories for both of you.

Talk About It:

Comments made by family, friends and strangers can be hurtful. If given the opportunity, tell others how you are feeling rather than letting it build up inside you. Educate them about the disease.

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