

Safety Considerations for Caregivers

As Alzheimer's disease progresses, the person's ability to navigate the environment declines, and safety is a concern. Increasing care and supervision is needed to keep the person safe.

As Alzheimer's disease progresses, confusion, disorientation, changes in perception and judgement, as well as balance issues, all affect the individual's safety. Caregivers can adapt the home and daily activities to minimize risk, maximize independence, and assure the individual's access to help in an emergency. Here are some tips to increase safety:

Home Safety Tips:

- ◆ Make an ongoing assessment of safety, asking the doctor for guidance on the person's care needs, including when 24/7 supervision is required.
- ◆ If the person is not safe to be home alone, consider home care, adult day services and/or alternative living situations to assure 24/7 supervision.
- ◆ Notify your local police and fire department of the person's need for special assistance in an emergency or community disaster.
- ◆ Use grab bars and a bath chair in the tub and shower.
- ◆ Keep your floors smooth but not slippery.
- ◆ Make sure stairwells are lit.
- ◆ Get nightlights for bathrooms and hallways.
- ◆ Keep walking areas free of clutter.
- ◆ Minimize glare and shadows.
- ◆ Use contrasting colors. For example, painting the edge of a step a different color than the rest of the floor will make that step easier to see.
- ◆ Wear low-heeled, comfortable shoes when walking around. Avoid walking in slippery socks or slippers.
- ◆ Make sure carpets are fully tacked to the ground, and avoid throw rugs.
- ◆ When the person with memory loss can no longer safely self-administer medication, family can dispense medication or use medication dispensing products.
- ◆ Lock up medicines and vitamins, cleaning products and hazardous materials.
- ◆ Consider installing a shut-off valve for the stove.
- ◆ Remove cords for power tools, and secure tools, gardening equipment and appliances that the person no longer remembers how to operate safely without assistance.
- ◆ Assure household safety by developing a plan for removing any guns from the home. Contact your local police for help if needed.

Driving:

- ◆ Have ongoing discussion with the doctor about the person's driving abilities. Share information about any changes that may impact driving: Has the person become more confused in handling familiar daily tasks? Has he/she gotten lost? Have there been any car accidents or traffic violations?

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- ◆ A driver evaluation by an occupational therapist may assist family and the doctor in assessing the person's driving safety at any point in time. Call Alzheimer's New Jersey to locate driver assessment centers in your area.
 - ◆ Identify alternative transportation options before they are needed so when the person with memory loss is no longer able to drive safely, transportation is available to his/her usual activities.
 - ◆ When the person is no longer able to drive safely, lock up the car keys so they are not accessible.
 - ◆ Consider having a kill switch installed in the car.
- Wandering:**
- ◆ Be aware that a person in any stage of Alzheimer's disease can get lost, and that wandering can put the person at serious risk.
 - ◆ Make sure that the person wears an identification bracelet.
 - ◆ Consider whether a GPS or tracking device would be helpful.
 - ◆ Discourage wandering by offering activities of interest every day, and by making sure the person is comfortable and not hungry, thirsty or in need of using the restroom.
- ◆ Have family/friends/companions join the person on regular walks.
 - ◆ Consider home care or adult day services to supplement the supervision family can offer.
 - ◆ Use alarms or bells on bedroom doors and exterior doors so you are alerted when doors are opened.
 - ◆ Keep items out of sight that may prompt the person to leave (for example, coats, hats, purses, etc.).
 - ◆ Decorate the door to the outside so it is not easily recognized as a doorway, or put a "STOP" sign on the inside of any exterior door.
 - ◆ Put a black mat on the floor inside a door leading outside. The person may perceive this as a hole in the floor and avoid the area.
 - ◆ Be aware that wandering may be more likely in unfamiliar places. Do not leave the person alone when traveling, shopping, etc.
 - ◆ In the event of a wandering incident, call 911 immediately and be prepared to provide police with a recent picture of the person.

Alzheimer's New Jersey's Always Safe® is a safety awareness program that provides educational information about safety issues for people with dementia. Always Safe provides individuals and families with educational information and resources about home and personal safety, and provides professional education and training about Alzheimer's and dementia to New Jersey law enforcement and emergency first-responders.

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