



FEATURE ARTICLE FROM ALWAYS BEST CARE

Tips for Helping Individuals with Dementia and Alzheimer's

by David J. Caesar

Caring for a person with Alzheimer's disease at home is a challenging task that can become overwhelming at times. Each day brings new demands and challenges as the caregiver copes with changing levels of ability and new patterns of behavior. In any demanding situation, the better you care for yourself, the better you will be able to care for your loved one.

Setting up Home Care

Soon after a diagnosis of Alzheimer's, it will be necessary to get started on making changes that help provide a sense of well being and physical safety for the affected person. Things that were taken for granted before, such as home safety and socializing, will now require some planning. There will be a need to communicate in new ways and make changes to the home environment. These changes include:

- Adjusting your communication style to your loved ones changing needs as the disease progresses.
- Scheduling visitors to avoid surprises and have something to look forward to. Even if the elder with dementia does not recognize those who visit, the contact is nonetheless valuable for them.
- Establishing routines in activities of daily living.
- Maintaining social contacts and fun.
- Setting up a safe home environment.
- Considering placement in a facility or hiring a private in-home care agency if caregiving becomes unmanageable for you or your loved one.

Whether it's assisted living placement or in-home support services, *Always Best Care's* trained staff can help!

Promoting Comfort and Safety

As the symptoms of Alzheimer's progress, the person becomes more emotionally fragile. At first, there may be the sense of grief and dread that accompanies the awareness of having a progressive, terminal illness. During this early stage of the disease, caregivers can promote the patient's sense of well being by providing emotional support and by helping to maintain familiar activities and social contacts. Eventually though, the diagnosis of Alzheimer's is forgotten and the ability to be rational fades. Logical thinking can no longer be used to help alleviate fear and confusion. As problems with memory and judgment increase, the patient becomes more vulnerable to accidents and injuries.

Problem behaviors develop that place the person at increased risk of getting lost or getting hurt. Caregivers must hone communication skills and make changes to the home environment in anticipation of the problems of mid-stage Alzheimer's disease. Following are some tips for promoting physical safety and emotional comfort.

Be sensitive and gentle about informing the patient of the diagnosis.

There will be times when you'll want to remind the person that they have Alzheimer's. At other times it might be better to refer to a "memory problem." Even if you repeatedly tell the elder that they have Alzheimer's disease, they may not remember that you told them. Be prepared to patiently repeat the information at times when you're trying to help the person understand why they can't do something or why you are taking over a task the person used to do.

Develop a positive attitude.

Many people look at their caregiving responsibility as a way of being involved with their loved one. Their caring is based on unconditional love, and they do not consider it a burden. Dementia patients are able to read body language and to respond to the positive attitudes of the caregiver. Where patient and caregiver have had problems in their past relationship, it can be especially challenging to empathize and be kind, so a support system for the caregiver is most important.

Learn to communicate with an Alzheimer's patient

Acknowledge requests and respond to them. Don't argue or try to change the person's mind, even if you believe the request is irrational. Be affectionate with the patient, if this feels natural. Try not to set up a cycle of paying attention only when the person displays problem behaviors. Break this negative cycle by being supportive of positive behavior.

Remember the worth of the person as a human being.

Even if they don't seem to respond, the person deserves to be loved and cared for, touched, and spoken to. Much like an infant, the dementia patient thrives on human contact. If treated poorly, the person feels rejection, loneliness, grief, and pain. Your warm, supportive care is essential to the dementia patient's well being.

Managing behavior problems.

Be accepting of the increasingly limited capabilities of the person with dementia and implement care strategies accordingly. Do your best to be patient, kind, flexible, supportive, and calm. This disease is no one's fault, although it is very aggravating and disappointing. By the same token, don't take problem behaviors (such as aggressiveness or wandering) personally. Accept the symptoms of the disease and proceed from there. Remember that the person is not behaving this way on purpose. For some of these problems, medications may be helpful

Expect the patient to totally lose their memory.

Be ready with boundless patience. Many Alzheimer's sufferers have no awareness of their loss of memory. You may feel aggravated at repetitive behaviors or with having to repeat what you just said, time and time again. The positive side of this is that the person is not as upset as you are; they don't realize what is happening to them or how it affects you.

Get emotional support for yourself.

The above suggestions can be hard to implement. You have your own sense of grief and loss about the diagnosis – feelings that may be compounded as you see the person you've known and loved gradually lose their familiar personality and abilities. Your lifestyle may be radically

changed, especially if you are the lone caregiver. Besides, some caregivers may have responsibility for a person who they weren't very close to, or who treated them badly in the past, making it particularly hard to stay positive or to empathize with the patient. Remember there is plenty of support for you in this journey if only you reach out for it. (Reference: www.helporg.com)

Always Best Care Senior Services can assist with Alzheimer's and Dementia Care from one day a week, just a few hours a day to 24-hour care, seven days a week. Call your local office to find out how Always Best Care can provide you with the support you deserve or visit us on the web at www.alwaysbestcare.com to find the location nearest you.

David J. Caesar is the Vice President of Franchise Operations at Always Best Care Senior Services. Through its network of more than 125 independently owned and operated franchises, Always Best Care provides non-medical in-home care, assisted living placement and skilled home health care for seniors across the country.



Always Best Care Senior Services

Always Best Care Senior Services (www.alwaysbestcare.com/) is based on the belief that having the right people for the right level of care means peace of mind for the client and family. Always Best Care Senior Services has assisted over 25,000 seniors, representing a wide range of illnesses and personal needs. This has established the company as one of the premier providers of in-home care, assisted living placement assistance, and skilled home health care.

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