



Caring for a person with Alzheimer's disease

Providing daily care for a person with Alzheimer's disease is an enormous responsibility. Here are some suggestions for making day-to-day tasks easier. You'll also find tips for maintaining your own health. Remember, you are important, too! If you're not well, you'll be unable to care for the person with Alzheimer's disease.

Feeding

- Some people with Alzheimer's need reminders to eat and may need step-by-step help through each meal.
- Playing with food suggests confusion caused by having too many choices. Serving one food at a time may help.
- If the person prefers one particular food, especially sweets or junk food, try varying the favorite food with other, more nutritious options.
- If the person is too restless to sit through a regular meal, serve small, frequent meals instead.
- A person who has trouble using utensils may do well with finger foods.
- If choking or difficulty swallowing becomes a problem, ask your doctor about changing the consistency of the food you serve.

Bathing

- Try to provide the type of bathing (tub bath, shower, or sponge bath) that the person with Alzheimer's prefers, at the time of day it's preferred.
- Let the person participate as much as possible—this enhances a sense of control. Or distract the person with food or a favorite object.
- Protect privacy as much as possible. Make sure room and water temperatures aren't too hot or cold, and keep background noise to a minimum. Also consider playing some soothing music.
- To promote safety, use shower chairs, handrails, rubber bath mats, and other products designed to prevent falls. If it's appropriate and safe, consider showering or bathing with the person so you're better able to prevent accidents.

Dressing

- If the person seems confused by too many clothing choices, store away garments worn infrequently and those that are out of season, and limit the day's choices to two outfits.
- Lay out clothes in the order they're to be put on.
- Make sure the clothes don't have frustrating buttons, hooks, snaps, or ties and are loose-fitting and comfortable. Jogging suits are a popular choice. Sneakers with touch fasteners may be best for people who can no longer tie their shoes.
- If the person disrobes in public, choose clothing that fastens in back.
- If the person likes to wear the same clothes, keep two identical sets so that one is available while the other is being laundered.

Sleep & toiletting

- Be sure the person with Alzheimer's gets plenty of physical activity during the day. This will improve nighttime sleep.
- Ask your doctor about restricting fluids in the evening so that sleep won't be interrupted by frequent urination.
- To make the toilet easier to find, leave the bathroom door open and the light on. Or, mark the door with a large sign or piece of brightly colored tape.
- Disguise wastepaper baskets, hampers, and other items that could be mistaken for the toilet.

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Medications & supplements

- Keep all medications and dietary supplements locked up. Remember that you need to supervise which medications the person takes and how much.
- If the person resists taking medication, be calm and reassuring. Try mixing medications with food, crushing pills and mixing them with a spoonful of applesauce or jelly, waiting until the person is more receptive, or asking your doctor about changing to a liquid instead of a pill.

Problem behaviors

- Avoid arguing with or confronting the patient. Instead, learn to accept the person's pacing, repeating words, and similar behaviors that are annoying but harmless.
- For more disruptive behaviors like yelling, start with reassurance. If that doesn't work, try distraction—for example, a snack, a walk, or a ride in the car.
- Don't take verbal abuse personally. People with Alzheimer's who swear or say hurtful things usually aren't aware of why they're saying them.
- Never answer verbal abuse. Responding may make the person physically violent.

Wandering

- To prevent the person from wandering away, move door locks, install a double dead bolt or other lock that would be hard for the patient to figure out, and hide the keys to doors that lock from the inside. Childproof doorknobs may also be effective. Consider disguising exits or installing door alarms.
- The person may leave despite your best efforts, so call **(800) 572-1122** to register with **Safe Return**, a program that helps reunite caregivers with lost Alzheimer's patients. Or go to the drugstore and get a **MedicAlert** bracelet or necklace, which can be engraved with the person's name, address, and other vital information.
- Ask neighbors to tell you if they see the person leave the house.
- To make it easier to track persons with Alzheimer's, keep a recent photograph handy. Use aluminum foil to make imprints of the soles of the person's favorite shoes. You may need to provide a scent for tracking dogs, so rub a cotton-tip applicator on the person's arm and store it in a plastic bag in the freezer.

Home safety

- Keep your home clutter-free with plenty of space to navigate between furniture. Avoid using throw rugs.
- Make sure the house is well-lit. Avoid changing furniture arrangements since this may confuse someone with Alzheimer's.
- "Safety-proof" the house by putting toxic chemicals out of reach; locking up guns, dangerous appliances, and tools; removing small items that the person could choke on; and hiding valuables.
- If you must go out, make sure the person can use the phone to call at least one family member or neighbor.

Taking care of yourself

- You need some regular time away from the person with Alzheimer's to have a change of pace, exercise, eat healthy meals, get needed health care, socialize, and just be yourself.
- You can make free time for yourself by getting the person to bed early and by asking family or friends to take over your duties for a couple of hours each day.
- Ask your doctor for information on other organizations that provide support services for patients with Alzheimer's and their caregivers. □

Call **(800) 272-3900** to reach the national headquarters of the **Alzheimer's Association**. They can steer you to information on local support groups, adult day-care centers, nursing homes, home health agencies, housekeeping and transportation services, and other services designed to support caregiving.