

Alzheimer's Disease

Tips for Caregivers

Caring for a person with Alzheimer's Disease (AD) at home is a difficult task and can become overwhelming at times. Each day brings new challenges as the caregiver copes with changing levels of ability and new patterns of behavior. Research has shown caregivers themselves often are at increased risk for depression and illness, especially if they do not receive adequate support from family, friends, and the community.

One of the biggest struggles caregivers face is dealing with the difficult behaviors of the person they are caring for. Dressing, bathing, eating -basic activities of daily living- often become difficult to manage for both the person with AD and the caregiver. Having a plan for getting through the day can help caregivers cope. Many caregivers have found it helpful to use strategies for dealing with difficult behaviors and stressful situations. Following are some suggestions to consider when faced with difficult aspects of caring for a person with AD.

Dealing with the Diagnosis

Finding out that a loved one has Alzheimer's disease can be stressful, frightening, and overwhelming. As you begin to take stock of the situation, here are some tips that may help:

- 1 - Ask the doctor any questions you have about AD. Find out what treatments might work best to alleviate symptoms or address behavior problems.
- 2 - Contact organizations such as the Alzheimer's Association and the Alzheimer's Disease Education and Referral (ADEAR) Center for more information about the disease, treatment options, and care giving resources. Some community groups may offer classes to teach care giving, problem-solving, and management skills.
- 3 - Find a support group where you can share your feelings and concerns. Members of support groups often have helpful ideas or know of useful resources based on their own experiences. Online support groups make it possible for caregivers to receive support without having to leave home.
- 4 - Study your day to see if you can develop a routine that makes things go more smoothly. If there are times of the day when the person with AD is less confused or more cooperative, plan your routine to make the most of those moments. Keep in mind that the way the person functions may change from day to day, so try to be flexible and adapt your routine as needed.

5 - Consider using adult day care or respite services to ease the day-to-day demands of care giving. These services allow you to have a break while knowing the person with AD is being well cared for.

6 - Begin to plan for the future. This may include getting financial and legal documents in order, investigating long term care options, and determining what services are covered by health insurance and Medicare.

Communication

Trying to communicate with a person who has AD can be a challenge. Both understanding and being understood may be difficult.

- * Choose simple words and short sentences and use a gentle, calm tone of voice.
- * Avoid talking to the person with AD like a baby or talking about the person as if he or she weren't there
- * Minimize distractions and noise - Such as the television or radio - to help the person focus on what you are saying.
- * Call the person by name, making sure you have his or her attention before speaking.
- * Allow enough time for a response. Be careful not to interrupt.
- * If the person with AD is struggling to find a word or communicate a thought, gently try to provide the word he or she is looking for.
- * Try to frame questions and instructions in a positive way.