

Your Employee Assistance Program is a support service that can help you take the first step toward change.

Tips When Caring for Someone with Alzheimer’s

As each person may experience the symptoms and progression of Alzheimer’s differently, care giving techniques can vary. However, it's important for all caregivers to understand that they will have to modify the way they communicate and interact with their loved one as the disease progresses. The following tips may help:

Frequently assess the level of assistance that your loved one requires as the disease progresses. For example, do they need help bathing, grooming, dressing or completing other necessary daily activities?

Expect frustration, agitation and even aggressive behavior as these are common reactions when tasks or decisions once easy for your loved one to complete become difficult.

Reduce the complexity of decisions for your loved one to help reduce anxiety. For example, simplify deciding what outfit to wear in the morning by offering two options rather than several.

Reduce the complexity of tasks for your loved one to help reduce frustration. For example, provide simple one-step-at-a-time instructions if your loved one is having difficulty with a task.

Try to stay flexible and don't worry about the way things "should" or "have always" been done. If there is no danger in how a loved one chooses to do a task, refrain from correcting them. After all, you're in a much better position to handle change than your loved one.

Create a calming environment that limits loud noises, large gatherings of people, and changes to routines. Changes in surroundings and other distractions can cause anxiety and impact your loved one's ability to think clearly.

Be patient when communicating and understand that your loved one's ability to use language the way they once could will decrease as the disease progresses. It's also often common for their behavior to eventually become the route by which they communicate wants and feelings.

Create a safe environment that's appropriate for the different stages of the disease. This includes: creating a clear pathway around the home or residence; installing fire extinguishers and checking smoke alarms; putting locks on cabinets that contain medicine, toxic substances, or sharp objects; and controlling access to the car or other vehicles or machinery.

Plan for the future early, and talk to your loved one about when and who will manage their financial and health-related activities and make future care giving decisions.

The most important thing for you to remember is to take care of yourself first and that your own care is just as important as your loved one’s. This means keeping yourself physically and emotionally healthy, contacting community support groups, asking friends and family for help when you need it, and not taking on more than you can reasonably handle. As well, it's not uncommon for caregivers to experience stress and depression, so you may want to get checked for the signs and symptoms of these conditions on a regular basis.
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