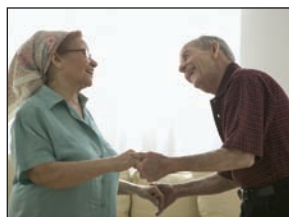


HELPFUL HINTS

Caregiving and Alzheimer's Disease



Overview

Caregiving for someone with Alzheimer's disease poses many challenges since the disease is progressive and significantly impacts an individual's memory, judgment, personality, behavior, and physical abilities. The demands on the caregiver are many and may feel overwhelming at times.

HELPFUL HINTS: Caregiving and Alzheimer's Disease, prepared in collaboration with the National Alliance for Caregiving (NAC), will provide caregivers with issues to think about and steps to take to address some of the challenges that accompany this illness.

Key Considerations

- 1. Understand that caregiving is a process not an event**
Be patient with yourself as a caregiver. Caregiving is a process that takes time and you will learn with each new experience. With an illness like Alzheimer's disease, a caregiver must be especially flexible and recognize that because of the nature of the illness what works one day may not work the next. Despite your best efforts there may be times when nothing seems to work. Each family's experience is unique and a process of trial and error often leads to the best approach to a specific circumstance.
- 2. Enlist the support of others**
Caring for a family member with Alzheimer's disease is a long, ever changing journey. It is helpful to start planning as early in the process as possible. For both you and your loved one it is necessary to seek help from others. It may take several inquiries and time

to get what you need but there are programs and people to support you. Don't wait until your responsibilities seem overwhelming. You can start introducing care on a gradual basis. It will give you some relief and help your family member adapt to other caregivers over time.

- 3. Try to understand what your family member may be feeling**
Continue to communicate with your family member through each stage of his or her illness, always treating him or her as an adult. As the disease progresses, alterations in your loved one's behavior may be upsetting and difficult. Always remember that these behaviors are part of the illness and may occur because he or she is trying to convey a feeling or a need. Reassurance from you can make all the difference for your family member, who is living in a constantly changing world of confusion, uncertainty, and often fear.
- 4. Communicate with body language as well as words.**
Patience and understanding will be required to communicate effectively. Repeat answers to questions your family member frequently asks, as if you had not heard them before. When speaking, face your family member and use a calm relaxed tone of voice. Try gestures to demonstrate what you are saying, if your family member does not seem to understand. Always be aware of the feelings and attitudes you may be conveying. People with Alzheimer's disease are often able to sense or understand the feeling of others when they can no longer process the meaning of words. They are therefore more sensitive to body language, tone of voice, eye contact, or physical touch.

5. Help your family member to be as independent as possible

As the disease progresses, your family member will have increasing difficulty with everyday activities such as bathing and dressing. While it may seem easier to do these things for him or her, it is important to try to help your family member to be as independent as possible. Find ways to simplify the task. For instance, if your family member has difficulty with zippers and buttons, find clothes that are easy to put on and off, e.g. pants with elastic waists.

6. Focus on your family member's strengths

Focus on the positive. Reinforce and use what your family member does well. Sometimes it is difficult to see the positives, but always remember very small successes can bring a sense of satisfaction and joy to your family member. How he or she feels about an activity is more important than how well he or she completes the task.

7. Communicate with other members of the care team

Keep in mind that you are often your family member's voice to those around him or her. Help those

caregivers who do not know your family member as you do understand the kind of person he or she was before this illness. You will need to educate them, as best you can, to what he or she likes or does not like. The knowledge you can give to others will help them to provide the kind of care that will most benefit your loved one.

8. Be aware of safety concerns

Do not expect your family member to be responsible for his or her own safety. You will need to adapt the environment as the illness progresses to help him or her function as independently and safely as possible. It is best to lock up items that are poisonous or potentially harmful. Your loved one may not be able to tell what can and cannot be eaten. Keep things simple and organized. Remove clutter. In later stages of the illness you may need to install door locks above eye level and remove knobs or disconnect stoves to prevent harm to your family member.