
Caring for someone with Alzheimer's Disease and related dementias

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Persons who are affected with Alzheimer's dementia show a gradual decline in all aspects of their functioning over time. The early symptoms usually are manifested in forgetfulness; the classic example: leaving the stove on.

In the early stages of the illness, clients are usually able to communicate well enough; however, as the disease progresses, the ability to communicate thoughts coherently may be affected.

Maintaining the family member's sense of self and dignity make caregiving easier.

Occupational therapists offer these Skills for the job of living tips to maintain a person's sense of self and dignity, and to make caregiving easier:

Respect the person's level of function and independence

- Be aware if your loved one is in the early, middle, or late stage of illness.
- Can they make their needs known?
- Can they make their own decisions?
- Does their YES mean yes, and their NO mean no?
- When the person is speaking, give time for full expression.
- Intervene, when necessary, with cues to clarify what they are saying.
- Maintain dignity by treating the person as an adult, not a child.

Too often caregivers in their attempt to help,

take too much independence away from the person affected with dementia.

Anticipate Needs:

- Is a noisy fan or radiator disturbing the person?
- Is the room temperature too hot or too cold? Are there drafts? Is the lighting too bright or too dark? Is the person cold, hot, hungry, thirsty, tired, wet, or in pain?

You do what you can to make their life easier with gentle direction

Develop cues for communicating:

- Tap into the past for possible codes (e.g. Does "fish" symbolize a pet name for a person?). Write down the codes, especially if there are several caregivers.
- If your loved one reverts to a mother tongue other than English, make a list of keywords essential for care in that language.
- Prepart the environment before a task SO the person can "see" what you want to do (e.g. before shaving, put out a sink full of water, shaving kit and cream). Rather than saying "you need to shave", you could say instead " I have the sink ready for you to come and have a shave, let's go to the bathroom." (see over)

Occupational Therapy

Skills for the job of living.

Be gentle with the person

- Reassure before a difficult task such as bathing: "I know this is uncomfortable for you ... I am here and I won't hurt you."
- Use 'a calm, unhurried approach.
- Prepare for the possibility that a task may take longer than expected. If the person is upset or angry, diffuse the situation and approach it five to 15 minutes later.
- Realize that people with Alzheimer disease are going through some frightening changes and can't make sense of the world they once knew.
- Remember, even if the person cannot coherently express their thoughts, they can still feel emotion, and can pick up on the other person's feelings.

Create a Support Network for Yourself:

- Take care of yourself first. Allow yourself time for just you. Allow for respite care. It is essential to your wellbeing and that of your loved one.
- Find and foster a support group in which you can share your grief and loss and receive the necessary understanding and support as you care for your loved one. A good place to start is with the nearest Alzheimer Society support group. If you need assistance finding one, ask an occupational therapist.

Finding an occupational therapist to help at home

Occupational therapy services for home-related problems can be accessed through many methods, including:

- Home Care programs through your regional health authority
- Extended health benefits with some insurers
- Veterans Affairs for eligible veterans
- Clients purchasing services directly from an occupational therapist

To find an occupational therapist go to our website at www.saot.ca and download the Private Practice Listing. Or for an occupational therapist employed by a regional health authority, phone Health Link, or go to the Inform Alberta website (www.informalberta.ca).

Adapted from Tips for Caring For a Person Affected with Alzheimer's Dementia and Related Dementia (ADRD) by: Munirah Manji, BScOT, OT(C), Occupational Therapist.



Occupational therapy assists you with the Skills for the job of living in caring for yourself and your family, in returning to work, and in resuming community activities.

For additional information of the benefits of occupational therapy and how it can assist you or someone you know, please contact:

info@saot.ca

www.saot.ca or www.otworks.com