
Coping with Alzheimer's: Helpful Hints for Caregivers in the Home



NAWROCKI CENTER
For Elder & Family Law

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Caring for a loved one with Alzheimer's is hard work. When you don't have time to consult the available information, use this as a quick reference.

Helpful Hints for Specific Behaviors

Does your loved one seem to be:

- ◆ **Bored**
- ◆ **Restless**
- ◆ **Picking at things**
- ◆ **Wandering**

Offer snacks or liquids. A person with Alzheimer's may have missed a meal or forgotten they had one.

Suggest that your loved one help with simple and repetitive tasks, like folding and unfolding laundry. Bring out the familiar pieces of games they once enjoyed, such as Monopoly, Parcheesi, or other board games. Also try giving them playing cards or crossword puzzles. It doesn't matter if they do any of it well, or even at all. The object is to keep them occupied with familiar items and tasks.

Restless and wandering patients need a safe place to wander and pace. They may just move around, or they may need a purpose, like carrying the newspaper from one part of the house to another, or going through old mail. Pet therapy can also work wonders. Be sure the animal is a calm breed, such a golden retriever. Or a smaller, lap dog may work better for others.

Is your loved one:

- ◆ **Tense**
- ◆ **Yelling "take me home"**
- ◆ **Refusing to move**
- ◆ **Irritable**
- ◆ **Worried**
- ◆ **Afraid**
- ◆ **Yelling "help me" over and over**

Always first ask or observe if your loved one is in pain. If not, remember these behaviors are often about feeling unsafe. Recall that persons with Alzheimer's have lucid times that come and go. Try to imagine how frightening they must feel. Do comforting things. One is always to approach the person from the front. Hold their hand if they will let you, or just touch a shoulder and tell them they are in a safe place. Reduce any noises from a radio or television that may be creating confusion or anxiety for them. Try calming music from years ago. Tell them they are in a safe place. If they will allow you, hugs can do wonders!

Is your loved one:

- ◆ **Crying**
- ◆ **Depressed**
- ◆ **Wanting to be alone**
- ◆ **Wanting to stay in bed**

We all have a right to our blue days, and at times, the person with this disease just feels deeply sad. They sense the changes in their lives, and they feel their losses. Put your arms around them and say it's okay to cry, it's okay to feel sad. Bit by bit, you may coax them up and about. Try old, familiar stories or old familiar prayers. If they refuse still to get up, come back in a little while and try again, or have a different person try. Music can make an extraordinary difference. Play

music they once loved; it will help them to reconnect to life.

In this case, you will be involved in a lot of physical care. Use touch. Stroking and rubbing of hands and feet (unless medically not advised for some other reason) will help keep the person “in touch,” and help with circulation to prevent skin breakdown. Your loved one will also need to be turned from side to back to the other side at regular intervals to prevent skin breakdown, commonly called bedsores.

Is your loved one:

◆ **Bedfast (i.e. unable to get out of bed at all, or only with great effort)**

Even if the person cannot move on their own, they can be repositioned -- such as moved to an upright chair, or a recliner if available. They can therefore be involved in the social activity going on around them and can be a part of it, too. Don't forget pet therapy or music. A home health nurse can give instructions on how to do exercises that are appropriate for your loved one.

You know your loved one best. Try to accept their behavior for what it is and do the best you can to respond in a loving way. You are already doing a job that most people cannot do. Take one day at a time and take care of you -- give some loving care to yourself. Ask for help from others. You may think it's a burden to them, but so many friends and neighbors would be glad to stay over for a few hours and let you get out for a while or just take a nap. And at the end of each day, understand -- no matter the frustrations or small failures -- that you are doing your best. No one can ask for more than that.

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