

Activities of Daily Living with Alzheimer's

The ability to perform everyday tasks involved in one's own personal care is a primary factor affecting quality of life. Caregivers must balance the need for assistance with the preservation of the person's dignity during activities of daily living (ADLs).

Dressing:

Getting dressed can present challenges for individuals with dementia. Some strategies are:

- ◆ Recognize the need for a sense of dignity.
- ◆ Encourage the individual to dress independently to whatever extent possible.
- ◆ Set a daily routine; try to have the individual get dressed at the same time each day.
- ◆ Allow plenty of time.
- ◆ Limit the choice of outfits.
- ◆ Clear closets and drawers of excess clothing to reduce confusion.
- ◆ Provide loose-fitting, comfortable clothes with elastic waistbands.
- ◆ Intervene when attempts at self-dressing are not working.
- ◆ Give one-step instructions if the person needs prompting, or use gestures to show what to do.
- ◆ Lay out the articles of clothing in the order they are to be put on.
- ◆ Use a consistent method of helping the person dress each day. For example, first dress the upper body and then the lower body. Offer one article of clothing at a time, in the same order each day.
- ◆ Don't argue if he/she wants to repeat an outfit. Consider having more than one of a favorite outfit.

Bathing:

Bathing is a complex activity composed of several steps: undressing, introduction into the shower or tub, washing, drying and re-dressing. Recognizing a person's abilities and preparing ahead of time can help simplify the process.

Tips to Ease Bathing:

- ◆ Follow the same bathing pattern as before the disease—time of day, frequency, etc.
- ◆ Provide privacy and be reassuring.
- ◆ Give one-step instructions and non-verbal cues.
- ◆ Prepare in advance—get soap, towels and other bathing items ready and lay out clothing.
- ◆ Make sure the room temperature is comfortable for disrobing.
- ◆ Minimize safety risks by never leaving the person unattended in the bath area, and by installing a non-skid surface and grab bars in tubs/showers.

Did you know?

Playing music during ADLs can help make the process a little easier. Sing or play recorded music during bathing or dressing to relax and distract the person who may be anxious about disrobing.

Alzheimer's New Jersey®

Incontinence Care:

Typically, an individual with dementia first develops occasional urinary incontinence that slowly progresses over a period of years to total loss of bladder control. A similar pattern is seen with bowel control, which becomes impaired in the late stages of dementia. **The sudden onset of incontinence suggests a behavioral or medical change, and should be evaluated by a physician.**

Methods for Toileting:

- ◆ Treat the individual with respect and dignity.
- ◆ Be reassuring when accidents occur.
- ◆ Establish a routine; for example, take the person to the bathroom every two hours while awake.
- ◆ Try to respond quickly to an individual's request for the bathroom.
- ◆ Watch for non-verbal cues, such as facial expressions or tugging on clothing.
- ◆ Put up signs (with illustrations) to indicate the bathroom door.
- ◆ Use easy-to-remove clothing, such as those with elastic waistbands.
- ◆ Avoid stimulants like caffeine in the evening.
- ◆ Until such efforts are counter-productive, continue to encourage the individual to use the bathroom, even if adult briefs are worn.
- ◆ Do not give liquids a few hours before bedtime.

Eating:

Weight loss is common among individuals with dementia, regardless of whether they are cared for at home or in a long-term care facility. Assessing why they are not eating and obtaining an accurate diagnosis are the first steps toward maintaining adequate nutrition and body weight.

Techniques to Assist with Eating:

- ◆ Consult a physician to detect any medical causes.
- ◆ Request a swallowing assessment from a speech therapist if the person is regularly having trouble chewing and swallowing.
- ◆ Have the person sit in an upright position.
- ◆ Try to arrange meals with others to increase socialization and make mealtimes more pleasant.
- ◆ Check that the person's mouth is empty, and that food isn't being held in the cheeks.
- ◆ Make sure they have their glasses, dentures and hearing aids.
- ◆ Prompt or feed those who can't feed themselves.
- ◆ Give adequate food they like and snacks.
- ◆ Present one item at a time.
- ◆ Serve the drink last if the individual drinks too much and then will not eat.
- ◆ Serve pre-cut or finger food.
- ◆ To promote fluid intake, consider mixing water with juice or other flavors the person enjoys.

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