



A caregiver's guide
**TO ALZHEIMER'S
AND DEMENTIA CARE**



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Being a senior caregiver is a rewarding experience because you have the power to improve the quality of life for your loved one every day. Caregiving responsibilities can also feel overwhelming at times. In addition to your job and other personal tasks, you need to stay on top of information and access resources to make the best decisions for your loved one, providing them with the best possible care.

Fundamentally, you want to be a good advocate for your senior loved one. This is especially true for caregivers of loved ones with Alzheimer's disease or dementia. Let's explore essential tips for everyday care and tasks so you can provide the support your senior loved one needs to live the best day possible each day.



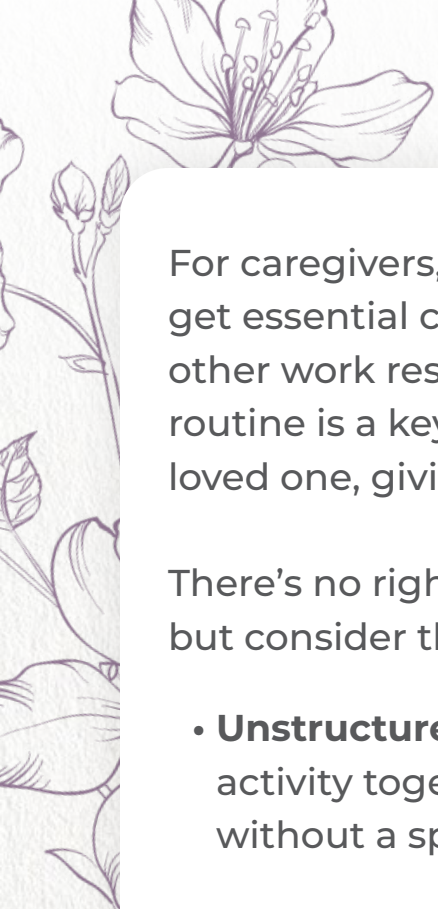
Tips for Everyday Care Needs

As a **senior caregiver** for a loved one with Alzheimer's disease or dementia, you can strategically tackle everyday care needs. Consider taking the following steps:

Adopt a routine.


Starting a routine with your loved one—and sticking with it—is key. Alzheimer's disease or dementia affects every aspect of brain function, resulting in behaviors such as agitation, paranoia, wandering, sleep difficulties, and aggression. A change in routine can be a major source of distress for those with Alzheimer's disease or dementia because that change creates an unstable and unpredictable environment, taxing your loved one's ability to cope.

Familiarity is key. Alzheimer's disease or dementia affects a person's ability to plan, start, and complete an activity. Familiar routines and activities, on the other hand, help your loved one feel comforted and calm, enabling them to retain a sense of independence during activities they can still perform on their own. Establishing a **daily routine** with your loved one will reduce their stress and anxiety because they know what to expect each day.



For caregivers, routines improve time management so you can get essential care-related tasks done within a day while managing other work responsibilities, chores, and self-care. Most importantly, routine is a key building block for a better relationship with your loved one, giving you more quality time to enjoy moments together.

There's no right or wrong way to start a routine with your loved one, but consider the following components as you establish a routine:

- **Unstructured time:** Sit and chat with your loved one, do an activity together, or go for a walk and enjoy your time side by side without a specific task or goal.
 - **Activities of daily living (ADL):** [ADLs](#) include activities such as bathing, eating, and grooming that your loved one may need assistance with.
 - **Self-care:** You need time for yourself! It's not a luxury; it's essential for you to recharge so you can be your best for your senior loved one.
 - **Necessary tasks:** Carve out time in your day for activities such as grocery shopping, meal preparation, picking up the kids from school, and other essential appointments. When possible, get support from family members and friends to complete them.
 - **Meaningful tasks:** Ensure there's room in the schedule for your loved one to pass the time with activities they enjoy, such as going for a walk or socializing with other family members.
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Write down important information.

Keep a notebook or calendar where you note to-do lists, appointments, and events. This will help your loved one know what to expect and also help you build a routine for each day. Remember to:

- Store the calendar or notebook in the same spot so you and your loved one can easily reference it.
- Keep the information you write down concise and free of abbreviations.
- Use bullet points and larger writing if your senior loved one has comprehension difficulties or visual impairment.

If your loved one can still complete activities independently, providing them with their own list of tasks for the day can be beneficial. For instance, try writing one task on a **sticky note**, which your loved one can throw away after completion. Keep in mind your unique circumstances as a senior caregiver and what works best for your loved one. For example, a calendar may work better than a notebook or sticky notes.

Include your loved one in care tasks and decisions.

Taking into account your loved one's physical and mental capabilities, provide them with opportunities to actively participate in as much of their own care as possible. For instance, keep in mind the following guidelines while assisting your loved one with dressing and bathing:

- Empower your loved one to do as much as they are able on their own.
- If you are assisting with these tasks, be gentle and respectful.
- Tell your loved one what you're going to do step by step.
- To make dressing easier and more comfortable, invest in loose-fitting clothing with elastic waistbands, fabric fasteners, and zippers instead of shoelaces.



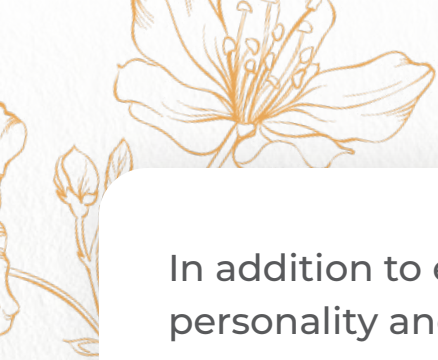


Strategies to Navigate Dementia-Related Behavior Changes

Alzheimer's disease or dementia is a progressive condition that causes brain functions to deteriorate over time. This results in regular changes in how individuals with Alzheimer's disease or dementia act

Some **common changes** you may see include:

- Getting easily worried or upset
- Depression
- Imagining things
- Hiding items or thinking that others are hiding items
- Misunderstanding what they see or hear
- Personal hygiene changes, such as no longer caring how they look, wearing the same clothes each day, or no longer bathing



In addition to establishing a daily routine to navigate these personality and behavior shifts, consider the following strategies:

Keep interactions simple and direct.

Remember not to inundate your loved one with multiple steps or requests at one time. Offer step-by-step instructions, and keep your directions simple.

You may need to repeat instructions and wait for a response. Allow more time for your loved one to respond, and try not to interrupt them. Remember to stay patient throughout your conversations and while giving instructions.

Create a soothing and calm environment.

When possible, remove stressors from your loved one's environment and turn it into a soothing, calm sanctuary. For example, ambient noise and background distractions like having the TV on may trigger agitation when your loved one is attempting to accomplish other tasks.

Consider providing a sense of security via an item such as a favorite blanket, low music, or singing. Use a calm voice to interact with them, and when your loved one is lashing out in frustration, try to understand the source. Ask if you can lend a hand, and reassure them that they're safe and you'll stay with them until they feel better. These little interactions go a long way toward reducing agitation.

Stay positive.

If you're feeling frustrated, try not to show it to your senior loved one because it may make them feel frustrated, as well. Take a few deep breaths, count to 10, or step away for a few minutes when you're able to do so safely.

Choose positive approaches when interacting with your loved one. For instance, if they make a mistake, don't point it out. Instead, guide them with phrases such as "Let's try doing this activity this way." If your loved one is helping with a task, always thank them for their participation, even if what they did wasn't perfect.





The Importance of Physical Activity

Physical activity provides many benefits, including maintaining a healthy weight, building strong bones and muscles, and keeping the heart and joints in good shape. It will also help your senior loved one feel better physically, sleep more soundly, and maintain overall health.

Think outside of the box.

Consider different activities to motivate your senior loved one to stay active. Some ideas to get you started are gardening, household chores, cooking, and baking. Remember to match the activity with your loved one's physical and mental capabilities and their natural interests.

Join in on the activity.

Participating in a physical activity with your loved one makes the experience more fun, and it may also motivate them to join in more enthusiastically. It provides you with an opportunity to stay active, as well, which **reduces caregiver stress** and improves your overall sense of well-being. Taking a walk outside together can be especially beneficial for getting in light exercise while enjoying nice weather and nature.

Keep realistic expectations.

Avoid doing or scheduling too much physical activity at one time. For example, cut workouts into several short sessions across the day rather than trying for one long session. Breaking workouts into simpler steps can also be helpful when implementing physical activity into your loved one's routine.

Add music.

People with Alzheimer's disease or dementia may have trouble starting physical activities or lack interest in them. However, if you begin the activity and add music to the experience, it may motivate your loved one to join in.



Essential Safety Tips to Prevent Falls

Taking steps to make your loved one's residence a safer place is important. The good news? Safety strategies are often simple to implement. For instance, here are easy ways you to **help your senior loved one avoid falls:**

Get active together.

A regular physical activity routine maintains overall wellness, and it also strengthens muscles and bones. Strengthening the legs is especially important for improving balance. Take walks and do light exercise together to not only gain health benefits but also enjoy quality time with each other.

Improve stairways.

If your senior loved one's residence has stairs, ensure there's at least one handrail to hold as they walk up and down. Additionally, if the stairs are carpeted, prevent tripping hazards by making sure the carpet is secure and doesn't have any wrinkles or rips.

Adding brightly colored tape or lighting along stairways makes the stairs easier to navigate. If you add lighting, choose an overhead or battery-powered option to eliminate cords, which are tripping hazards.

Remove household tripping hazards.

Secure cords and rugs that your loved one may trip over, and remove unused items or other clutter along walkways. If pieces of furniture crowd high-traffic areas, reorganize the space to create clear pathways. This may involve rightsizing unused items to make space.

Fall-proof the bathroom.

Many falls happen in the bathroom when moisture creates slippery conditions. For extra stability, add grab bars in the shower or tub and near the toilet. Include slip-proof mats in the shower or tub, as well as rubber-backed rugs on the bathroom floor for extra traction. You may also want to invest in a shower chair for your senior loved one to use while bathing.



Senior Caregiver Self-Care Tips

Senior caregivers naturally tend to focus more on their loved one's needs, so self-care is often the first thing dropped from the big to-do list. Self-care may even feel selfish, and it can be hard to assert yourself and tend to your own needs.

Here's the reality: You can't provide the best care for your senior loved one if you're not caring for yourself. Taking time to care for your needs is essential so you have the mental and physical resources to effectively meet your loved one's needs and avoid burnout.

Keep up with your own healthcare and preventative care.

Make time to care for your own health. Remember that avoiding a medical appointment today could compromise how well you're able to care for your senior loved one in the future.

Make time for your own exercise.

Exercise is incredibly beneficial to reducing stress and pain, even if you only fit in 15 minutes a day. Participate in exercise activities with your senior loved one when possible, and take a walk on your own or with a friend to connect with places and people outside of your caregiving responsibilities.

Don't drop your hobbies.

It can seem hard to fit in time for beloved hobbies, but your mental health will benefit when you carve out time to read, watch a show you enjoy, or put together a puzzle to relieve stress and recharge for the next day of caregiving.

Ask for help.

You don't have to do this alone, nor should you try. Ask family members and friends for assistance with activities such as grocery shopping, meal preparation, pharmacy pick-ups, and other activities.

Seek out the right support groups.

Caregiver support groups can be highly beneficial. The idea of talking about yourself with strangers may feel overwhelming, but the experience often provides participants with a sense of freedom. You'll get to know people in the same caregiving situation, commiserate about the challenges you face, and learn other caregivers' ideas for balancing senior caregiving with other tasks. Remember, not all caregiver support groups are alike—it may take a couple of meetings to **find a group that works for you.**



Create a Plan for the Future

As you know, Alzheimer's disease and dementia are progressive conditions. Your senior loved one may be currently thriving, but in the future, they may need additional daily support. One way to plan for the future is to consider a [**memory care community**](#), which is specially designed for individuals with Alzheimer's disease or dementia.

Cedarhurst Senior Living is here for you and your family when you need us. [**Explore our communities by scheduling a tour today.**](#)