

*Staple
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Alzheimer's Resource Guide

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*Many of the monetary and other guidelines discussed in this booklet change frequently. Please be certain to verify their accuracy before acting based on these numbers.

Acknowledgement

This booklet is derived from an article by Peggy Tener, B.S.W., N.H.A. “Caring for Someone with Alzheimer’s...Real World Strategies that Work!”

Introduction

Caring for someone with Alzheimer's disease can be challenging for a number of reasons. Alzheimer's patients now seem to be different people than they once were: They think, act, and react differently than they did before the disease took over. In addition, you are now adjusting to the responsibility of caring for the daily needs of someone who once was your parent or your life partner. Plus, you must remember to take care of yourself both for your own benefit and to help the one you love. Ultimately, your best coping skill is a good sense of humor. Remember that your loved one is not a mission to drive you over the edge. In fact, the person with Alzheimer's disease might think *you* are the one who is acting strangely!

With this guide, we hope to provide you with practical, helpful information that will make caring for your loved one at least a bit easier. To ensure continued care for your loved one, be certain you have the proper legal and medical planning in place. Please visit our website for additional information on elder care planning, supplemental needs trusts, and other elder care planning information.

You can call our office at any time with your questions, or for a schedule of our presentations on this and other elder care topics.

Your Daily Routine

Establishing a routine is one of the best ways to create a good environment for you and your loved one. Keeping a steady routine will help your loved one sleep at night, remain continent, and be less agitated. Try to have meals and snacks at the same time, and try to assist with toileting and bathing at the same times everyday.

Try to incorporate regular activities like daily walks, listening to music, and other pastimes. This is not only helpful to your loved one, but it allows you some pleasure as well. Plan the activities for short periods, and try to do things that were once important to the person with Alzheimer's, such as cooking, office-type projects, or reading the financial news. And, be certain to schedule quiet time, time that will allow you to catch up on your other activities.

Try to prevent your loved one from sleeping all day. If wandering is a problem, pin a note to the shirt, jacket, or sweater with name, address, and phone number, as well as your name.

Tips for Daily Activities

What can be the most troublesome are the day-to-day activities that you once took for granted, but have

now become a chore. If you understand the cause behind some of the behaviors, though, you will be better equipped to handle problems.

EATING: Our sense of taste decreases with age, so if you are the one doing the cooking, perhaps adding a bit more seasoning to at least a portion of the meal will help meals go more smoothly. If your loved one is cooking, be understanding if the flavoring seems stronger than usual.

Sometimes the problem with eating is related to vision: The person with Alzheimer's might not be able to distinguish the food from the plate it is on, or perhaps the plate from the table. A white plate on a white tablecloth to serve mashed potatoes might not be a good idea if your loved one is having eating problems.

If the ability to grasp silverware is a problem, medical supply stores sell special utensils for those who have limitations with their motor skills. If sitting is a problem, then serve finger foods that can be eaten while pacing or walking.

Finally, encourage your loved one to drink plenty of water to hydrate the skin, prevent bedsores, and avoid constipation. And, try to limit the intake of caffeine and sugar. Caffeine will decrease the appetite, and sugar will create a feeling of fullness with empty calories.

BATHING and HYGIENE: As with eating, a problem with sight and recognition of objects may be behind a reluctance to bathe. Clear water in a white tub can be confusing, so perhaps try adding colored bath salts. Having your loved one stand in the tub as it fills also makes the experience less frightening than just getting in and sitting in a tub of water.

You will also need the appropriate equipment, such as hand/grab rails, a non-slip tub mat, and a shower stool. Make sure the bathroom is very warm, since many elderly people suffer from circulation problems.

For oral hygiene, you might want to try the swabs available in medical supply stores. These swabs contain a substance, such as glycerin, to help in cleaning the teeth and mouth.

DRESSING: The goal should be comfortable and safe attire. Unless it creates a hazard, perhaps it is not worth worrying about your loved one's desire to wear multiple layers. That sort of hoarding and gathering behavior is common with Alzheimer's patients, and sometimes you will need to make decisions about what to argue about.

Your loved ones shoes should be easy to get on and off, and should have nonskid soles. Especially if your loved one leans forward while walking or shuffles, you should avoid shoe laces. If they come untied, they could cause a fall.

Outings

Taking your loved one for even a short trip can more of a challenge than you might expect. The first decision you must make is whether the trip is necessary. Just because you have always done something -- dinner out on a Wednesday night, religious services on the weekend -- doesn't mean that you should continue to do so. You must consciously evaluate whether your loved one really benefits from the activity. Perhaps you could ask another family member or trusted friend to be the caretaker for the day or evening so you can take a break.

If you must go, then choose the time of day wisely. You will be able to recognize whether your loved one is most alert in the morning, or whether anxiety attacks are common after lunch. Select the time you go to coincide with natural body rhythms.

Make sure you leave plenty of time to reach your destination, and be certain to have whatever you would need in case of an emergency with you. If your loved one takes a medication daily an hour or so after the scheduled doctor's appointment, make sure you bring it with you just in case the doctor is running late. Try to account for as much as you can in advance to relieve as much stress as possible.

Also consider taking food, pictures, or other

familiar items; these will help calm a person with Alzheimer's who is upset.

Medical Appointments

Many of your outings will involve trips to the doctor's office. Make sure you have all important information, such as insurance cards, medications, medical history, and the names of other treating physicians with you.

It is difficult to remember everything a doctor says under the best of circumstances, and certainly a doctor's visit with your loved is not the best of circumstances. Take a proactive approach, asking questions and jotting down notes as needed. If your doctor is uncomfortable with this, it's time to find another doctor.

Keep your notes from your loved one's different doctors with you for all of your appointments. In particular, be certain to track medications. Most likely, a person with Alzheimer's will be treated for more than illness at a time, and it's important that each doctor know the exact medication and doses that other doctors have prescribed.

Taking Care of Yourself

Caring for another is stressful, and it's critical that

you take time out for yourself. Family and friends will likely offer to help you, and you should not be reluctant to take them up on it. Or, depending on your financial circumstances, a private duty nurse or adult day care might be alternatives to give you a break to take care of your own needs. Make sure you leave vital information about your loved one -- medications, your contact information, methods of calming -- with your relief caregiver.

Be careful to take care of yourself and don't lose sight of what is important to you. On the other hand, be sure what you think is important really is. Having a perfectly clean and tidy house might simply not be an option, and letting that go will relieve much stress.

Alternative Care

As difficult as it may be to face, there will likely come a time when you will not be able to care for loved one at home. Some considerations to factor in when making that difficult decision:

- Is your loved one too frail to manage safely at home?
- Is your loved one agitated and dangerous to you or others?
- Are you becoming ill or physically exhausted?

- Are physicians recommending your loved one get care outside the home?

- Is caring for loved one causing too much stress on the rest of the family?

- Is your loved one in danger of wandering away from home?

As painful as it might be, it is important to be aware of your own limitations, and of those of your loved one. With the proper planning in place, the transition to an outside facility can be smooth, and you will be confident that you are making the correct decision.

Conclusion

We welcome your questions and the opportunity to speak with about your long-term physical care and elder law needs. Constantly changing state and federal laws and regulations make this a particularly difficult area of the law to navigate. Our firm keeps current on these changes not only by tracking legislation, but by regularly attending and presenting at local, state, and national elder law seminars. We look at our clients' situations in a holistic manner, taking into consideration physical, spiritual, and financial needs.

For additional helpful articles on elder law, please visit our website at www.law4elders.com.

Jack M. Rosenkranz

Notes

Jack M. Rosenkranz received his law degree from the Walter F. George School of Law at Mercer University and his undergraduate degree from Memphis State University. In college, and again in law school, he used his skills and his knowledge of political science and public surveys to bring much-needed changes to campus policies. As a result of his efforts at college, he was awarded the John W. Burgess Award for Meritorious Achievement in Political Science.

Mr. Rosenkranz now uses his natural abilities and legal training in his Elder Law practice, which includes Medicaid and Medicare planning, estate planning, advanced directives, Veterans benefits (such as Aid and Attendance), probate, supplemental trusts, and other long-term care planning needs. He was the first to receive both the Outstanding Achievement Award for the Florida Chapter of National Academy of Elder Law Attorneys and the Member of the Year Award for the Elder Law Section of the Florida Bar in the same year.

His peers have selected him as a Leading American Attorney in Elder Law, and he has an AV rating, the highest possible, with Martindale Hubbell. He remains active in the Elder Law Section of the Florida Bar, the Florida Academy of Elder Law Attorneys, and the National Academy of Elder Law Attorneys, Inc. Mr. Rosenkranz mentors new elder law practitioners, sharing with them the knowledge he has obtained from attending and presenting at numerous local, state, and national seminars each year since he began his practice in 1991.

Mr. Rosenkranz has co-hosted a weekly radio program, "The Informed Elder," on 570 WHNZ. He regularly gives presentations and other informative talks about elder law to the public and to other attorneys.