

Staying Independent is Key with Memory Loss

Staying independent for as long as possible is key for those living with Alzheimer's disease and dementia. Yet as caregivers it is easy to begin compensating for your loved one. It may start by finishing sentences for them; tying shoes; buttoning shirts; feeding them and doing other things to "help" or get things done more quickly, but the reality is that the longer someone is able to do things for themselves the better.

Alzheimer's disease and dementia are progressive diseases, which mean that over time symptoms will increase, usually causing the person to lose the ability to perform certain tasks. That is why it is very important to help those living with the disease remain as independent and to focus on what they can do, not on what they can't.

Here are a few ways that you can help your loved one stay independent:

Routine and schedule: People living with Alzheimer's disease and dementia tend to do better when they follow a routine such as waking, then eating, followed by brushing their teeth and washing their face. In addition, sticking to a basic daily schedule can also lesson anxiety and help maintain their sense of security.

Grooming – As the disease progresses people may find it hard to button clothes. By switching to elastic pants, pullover shirts, slip-on shoes and Velcro jackets you may find that your loved one can get ready on their own for longer. If making simple decisions like what to wear is too overwhelming, limit their clothing choices or layout their clothes in the order that they should wear them. You may also want to consider creating cue or picture cards that visually describe their morning routine.

Eating – Some people develop anxiety issues and have a hard time sitting down for a meal or manipulating silverware. By switching to more finger friendly foods such as sandwiches, pitas or wraps you can make sure that your loved one is still eating nutritiously and is not embarrassed by being fed or spilling.

Bathroom – If incontinence becomes an issue label your bathroom door(s) and make sure that you leave the lights on in your bathroom(s). Sometimes just seeing the toilet can trigger the need to urinate. You may also want to consider getting on a schedule so that your loved one's body will "know" when to go. However realize that keeping to that schedule is very important and can cause your loved one anxiety and potential accidents if not followed.

Activity – those living with Alzheimer's disease and dementia have the ability to be socially active far into their disease and should be encouraged to continue with activities. The main thing to remember is that an activity should be failure free and that whatever the outcome it should be celebrated. One thing you might notice is that as the disease progresses the person's attention span shortens. If this happens, it is a good idea to set-up a hobby station that the person can easily drop-in and out of several times a day. If reading is an issue, make sure your lighting and print size is increased, look for short stories, books on cd or use simple picture books.

By focusing on what they can do and by taking the time to let them succeed at their own pace you are handing them the keys to maintaining their independence and dignity. The two greatest gifts that anyone can give!

Azura Memory Care offers a unique model of memory care services and programs for those suffering from dementia and Alzheimer's. The company believes in the importance of transforming the culture of care through transformational programming and educational outreach. Azura Memory Care offers 13 locations in Wisconsin including Beloit, Clinton, Eau Claire, Green Bay, Janesville, Kenosha North, Kenosha South, Manitowoc, Monroe, Oshkosh, Sheboygan, Stoughton and Wausau. Visit www.azuramemory.com for additional information.