

ALZHEIMER'S DISEASE

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Alzheimer's Disease is the most common cause of dementia in people age 65 and older. According to the Alzheimer's Disease Education & Referral Center, it is estimated that 4.5 million people have Alzheimer's Disease. By 2050 it is estimated that 13.2 million people will have Alzheimer's Disease, if no preventative treatments become available. As you can see by these statistics most people will have a loved one, whether friend or family, who will be diagnosed with Alzheimer's Disease. It is imperative that caregivers know what actions to take if Alzheimer's Disease strikes their family.

What actions can I take if a loved one has Alzheimer's Disease?

1. Understand the need to identify dementia at an early stage. Talk to your physician about any concerns you have for yourself or a loved one.
2. Utilize national resources such as the Alzheimer's Association to gain information and support.

The 24 hour telephone number for the Alzheimer's Association is 1-800-272-3900.

3. Encourage families and patients, especially those in the early stages of Alzheimer's Disease, to write down or videotape family memories and stories.
4. If your loved one is a veteran you may be eligible for community services through the VA.
5. Home Health Care or Hospice services may be available to offer support to patients with Alzheimer's Disease. You may call Hoosier Uplands Home Health Care & Hospice at 1-800-827-2219, and ask for an intake RN, to see if your family member qualifies for Home Health Care or Hospice.

What are common behaviors my loved one may experience and why do these behaviors occur?

1. Feelings of responsibility toward a long-ago night shift job as a night watchman resurfaces and a man is compelled to get up in the night, get dressed and attempt to leave the home.
2. A woman may angrily refuse to bathe or get dressed because she does not understand what a caregiver has asked her to do. The anger masks the confusion and anxiety she is feeling.
3. Taking off clothes may seem reasonable to a man with Alzheimer's Disease who feels hot and doesn't understand or remember that undressing in public is not acceptable.
4. Constantly following a trusted and loved husband may be the only source of security to a woman who feels that the world around her is unknown and frightening.

How can I deal with the above behaviors?

1. Divert attention away from the source of distress, going for a walk, listening to soothing music, creating tasks like sorting clothes and weeding and reminiscing with a photo album.
2. Remain calm and be understanding.
3. Be patient and flexible.
4. Don't argue or try to convince.
5. Try not to take behaviors personally.
6. Give yourself a break and don't be hard on yourself.

7. Accept the behavior as a reality of the disease and try to work through it. Remember: it's the disease talking, not your loved one.

For more information on Alzheimer's Disease go to www.alzheimers.org or www.hospicefoundation.org. Research for this article was obtained with the assistance of the Alzheimer's Disease Education & Referral Center & The Hospice Foundation of America.