

Caregiver Strategies- Dementia

Caring for Loved Ones with Dementia

Caring for your loved one with dementia can be a change that comes with rewards and challenges. This handout outlines a few strategies to use to aid in your caregiving.

Keeping a Schedule

During the earlier stages of dementia, it is important to begin setting a daily routine. Having a routine early on, helps individuals with dementia better perform their daily activities and can assist with procedural memory of daily routine in later on. This routine can include getting dressed in the morning, timing of meals, bathing, exercise, medications, and other activities performed at the same time/ in the same order every day. It may also be advantageous to keep a calendar for both you and your loved one to write down reminders and appointments for references. Most importantly, try to include your loved one in their own daily planning as much as possible.

Communication

When communicating with your loved one with dementia, it is important to remember the acronym “KISS” (keep it short and simple). Speak slowly in a calm voice and in a succinct manner. Faster, wordier speech can often cause confusion or overwhelm. As much as it is important to alter your own speech, it is just as important to give lengthy pauses for your loved one to answer/ speak to you. Do not rush responses and actively encourage participation in conversation early on. Lastly, use reassuring language and tone when they voice their fears, thoughts, and feelings to you. Given them plenty of time in an open environment to speak about their thoughts and feelings. In return, verbalizing your understanding of what they have said and reassuring them that you have heard their concerns keeps your communication open.

Safety

Home safety is important as some household objects can become dangerous items. Clear all walkways of rugs, shoes, electrical cords, and other items on the floor that could become tripping hazards. Well lit hallways and stairwells are important to avoid injury. Ensure that all chemicals, cleaners, and medications are safely stowed in a locked cabinet/ closet. If your loved one is home alone, ensure doors are locked and, if possible, utilize technology such as ring cameras to ensure safety. Overall, assess your home environment to keep your loved one safe without restricting them in the home.

Activity Recommendations

Exercise is important for maintaining physical and mental health in any individual. It is important to find activities that are engaging forms of exercise such as walking, biking, sports, etc. It is recommended to participate in at least 150 minutes of aerobic exercise a week in addition to two days strengthening exercise. Going on a brisk walk or participating in an exercise class is something you and your loved one can participate in together or separately. Adequate hydration and nutrition are important surrounding any exercise program.

Taking Care of Yourself

Lastly but of equal importance is taking care of yourself as a caregiver. Make time to continue to participate in your own hobbies and activities. Take time each day for yourself to be alone, see friends and family, read, go on a walk, watch a TV show, etc. Research support groups in your area and do not hesitate to ask for help when needed. Making a schedule for your own safe care early on is just as important as making a schedule for your loved one. Being a caretaker can often be hard work so staying on top of your own health needs not only benefits you, but will benefit your loved one in the long run.

References and Resources

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<https://www.alz.org/help-support/caregiving/safety/home-safety>

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