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# The Family Guide to Alzheimer's & Dementia Care

Important Considerations as You Begin Your Journey.



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## Ready, Set, Go! Preparing for the Dementia Care Journey- Do This Now.

Learning that a loved one has Alzheimer's Disease can be overwhelming, but there are several things you need to take care of right away. In fact, some of the first steps you should take after learning of a loved one's Alzheimer's diagnosis include:

- **Prepare your home.** - One of the primary concerns when bringing home a loved one who has Alzheimer's is safety. Depending on your home's current setup, you may need to make changes to your bathroom, bedrooms, stairs, doors and other aspects of the house to make it safer for your loved one.

*Taking care of these things may even help you to feel more in control of the situation.*

- **Take care of paperwork.** - In most cases, there will be legal and practical considerations, such as the individual's finances. Take care of these issues as soon as you can after learning of your loved one's diagnosis.
- **Prepare for in-home care.** - At some point, your loved one will likely need in-home care as the disease progresses. Make these arrangements early so you don't have to worry about them later.
- **Prepare for changes in mental status/ability.** - Alzheimer's disease causes an individual's mental status and abilities to decline over time. Learn about what you can expect as the disease progresses and prepare for this process as much as you can.
- **Make a list of medications.** - Make a list of all of the medications your loved one takes so you can keep track. Be sure to update this list over time.
- **Get involved in a support group.** - Whether you are the patient or the caregiver, Alzheimer's disease is a difficult road. Consider joining an appropriate support group. If you are the caregiver of someone who has Alzheimer's disease, your loved one may be interested in a support group as well.

## The Stages of Alzheimer's Disease – Where are You?

There are three primary stages of Alzheimer's disease: mild, moderate and severe. These stages may also be referred to as "early," "middle" and "late."



During the mild stage, the problems associated with the disease are not that apparent and may only be noticed by family members or close friends. The individual may forget new information, such as the material he or she just read. He or she may also start misplacing things.

During the moderate stage of the disease, the symptoms of Alzheimer's become noticeable to others. The individual may become moody and

withdrawn. He or she may forget important life events, get confused, get lost and need help with certain self-care tasks.

During the severe stage of the disease, the individual needs care and supervision at all times. He or she loses awareness of surroundings and recent experiences, and the individual may also be unable to communicate effectively.

## Keeping Mom or Dad at Home When They Have Alzheimer's Disease

Many people hope to keep their loved one at home as long as possible after he or she has been diagnosed with Alzheimer's disease. In many cases, the affected individual's preference is also to remain at home in a familiar and comfortable environment. In some cases, it may be possible to keep the individual at home even through the latest stages of Alzheimer's disease. However, this will depend on the family's resources, including the availability of caregivers and/or the ability to pay for at-home care, as well as the affected individual's physical condition.

## Taking a Break from Caregiving- Using Respite Care Options

Caring with someone who has Alzheimer's disease is time and resource intensive. In some cases, you may need a break from providing care for a few weeks or months, or you may need part-time assistance on an ongoing basis. Fortunately, respite care for your loved one is available from several different sources, including home care services, assisted living and nursing homes. Each of these sources of respite care can provide you with the relief and/or freedom you need to continue playing an active role in the care of your loved one.



### How to Select a Home Care Agency When Your Loved One Has Dementia

If your loved one has dementia or Alzheimer's disease and you need a home care agency, you want to be sure that the agency you choose is capable of caring for your loved one effectively.

When comparing different agencies, you can learn everything you need to know by reading testimonials, asking trusted sources for referrals, reviewing licensing information and making sure all caregivers employed by the agency are trained to provide care to individuals suffering from dementia or Alzheimer's disease. It is also important to verify that the home care agency you choose is bonded and insured.

## Preparing Your Aging-Loved One's Home for In-Home Care Services

If you are utilizing in-home care services for your loved one, it is important to prepare for these services before they begin. Make sure that your house is organized, clean and decluttered before in-home care begins. It is also important to secure any pets when in-home care providers are present. Develop a clear schedule for the in-home care provider to follow, and make sure he or she has access to easy meals your loved one enjoys. Make the in-home care provider aware of any food allergies or medications your loved one needs as well. Furthermore, if you are hiring an in-home care provider, it is important to make sure that he or she knows how to reach you in the event of an emergency.

## Keep Mom or Dad Safe: Alzheimer's Disease and Dementia- How to Keep Your Loved-One Safe in their Home



When a loved one is living at home with Alzheimer's disease or dementia, safety is always a concern. As your loved one's disease progresses, be sure to take the necessary precautions to prevent falls around the home. This may involve eliminating obstacles and/or installing assistive devices in specific locations, such as the bathroom. You should also take precautions to prevent your loved one from wandering out of the home, such as keeping

doors locked. It is especially important to guard against wandering off later in the day or at night, as Alzheimer's patients are prone to experience "sundowning" and/or insomnia during these times.

## Do They Know? Home Care Aides and Alzheimer's Disease: Do They Have the Right Training or Experience?

Caring for a patient with Alzheimer's disease is not the same as caring for patients with other ailments. When hiring home care aides, it is important to consider the individual's training and experience carefully. In general, it is best to hire someone who has been trained specifically for this purpose. Experience caring for previous patients with Alzheimer's disease or dementia is also valuable. Be sure to ask home care aides about their training and experience before they begin interacting with your loved one.

## How Can I Keep My Aging Parent Out of Nursing Home? Is it Possible?

Nursing home care is not necessarily inevitable for someone with Alzheimer's disease. Although some people may have no choice, it is possible to keep your loved one at home in the right circumstances. If you have enough family members willing to help, the ability to hire 24-hour care for your loved one and a safe environment, you may be able to keep him or her with you even in the later stages of the disease.

In some cases, nursing home care may be unavoidable, however. For example, if the individual is too sick to remain at home or you cannot afford a trained in-home caregiver, you may need to consider nursing home care.

## Assisted Living and Alzheimer's Disease- Getting Additional Help

In the earlier stages of Alzheimer's disease, it may be possible for your loved one to remain more independent in an assisted living situation. For many people with Alzheimer's disease, maintaining as much independence as possible is a priority. In general, your loved one can remain in assisted living for as long as he or she is able to get out of the building without assistance in the event of a fire, even if the individual needs help with other basic tasks.



### Current Treatments for Alzheimer's Disease. When will there be a cure?

There is currently no cure for Alzheimer's disease. However, treatments are available to help with symptoms and/or slow the progression of the illness. Some patients may also take other medications, such as antidepressants, to deal with the mood and behavioral aspects of Alzheimer's disease.

Although there is not currently a cure for this illness, research is ongoing. Clinical trials are available for individuals who want to be the first to try new treatments.

In addition, some new treatments that are currently being investigated may be available to the general public in the near future. Scientists hope to eventually cure Alzheimer's disease, but it isn't clear when a cure will become available.

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