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Caregiving in The Comfort of Home®

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Caregiver Assistance News

"CARING FOR YOU...CARING FOR OTHERS"

Alzheimer's - Balancing Safety and Risk

How can you decide what activities are safe for a person with Alzheimer's disease (AD) versus what are not? The doctor who conducted the diagnostic evaluation can help you answer this question. In the case of driving safety, driving tests can be arranged. Your own experience and observations of the person can help you decide what to do. Friends and family may have noticed something you did not. For example, if you, or other people, feel anxious because of unsafe driving, you cannot ignore the problem.

Your decisions will be easier to carry out if the person with dementia is aware of the diagnosis and understands that he will not be able to do things he did in the past. However, often the person denies the changes and resists your efforts to limit his activities—whether it be driving, using public transportation alone, using power tools or cooking. The doctor, family members, friends, or neighbors may be able to help you work around the problem. For example, friends or family may offer to drive you and him where you need to go or perform other activities without mentioning that it is because the person is no longer able to do them.

Physically Aggressive Behavior

At some point in the course of the disease, people with Alzheimer's may become physically aggressive, although this does not occur as often as people think. They may sometimes throw things, hit, kick, bite, or pinch

the caregiver or others they come into contact with. They may not know why they are doing this, and they may not even realize that they are doing it. This behavior can be frightening. These behaviors are probably an indication that the person with AD is upset about some *need* not being met, such as a *physical* need—comfort, pain, hunger or an *emotional* need such as boredom, fear or sadness.

Violent behavior may be the way this person is responding to changes in his brain or to events that he doesn't understand and interprets as dangerous. These might be an unfamiliar person entering the room, attempts to take something away from him, fear of being hurt, an exaggerated response to something happening suddenly, not knowing how to express anger appropriately, or just an effort to avoid complying with a demand.

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When it looks like he is getting upset, and may seem to be spoiling for a fight, perhaps using threatening language, you may feel frightened and tempted to fight back. Try to stay calm, use a reassuring tone, and distract the person. Usually, the person with Alzheimer's disease will calm down in a few minutes if you do not fight back or can redirect him.

Steps to Avoid Injury

Don't try to restrain the person. This could cause serious injury to both of you.

1. Get out of striking distance. Step away so that he cannot reach you.
2. Call for help if you need it. You can call a friend, family member, or neighbor to help you get the person calmed down. If you have to, you can also call 911 or your local emergency number.
3. Try to avoid creating a situation in which the person with AD will feel threatened because this will only make him more upset. When things have calmed down figure out what has set the person off using the ABC method below.

The ABC Way to Understand Alzheimer's Behavior

A person with Alzheimer's disease may sometimes act in ways that are aggressive. He or she may hit, scratch, or fight with the caregiver. This does not always happen. If this does happen, it is likely to be when the person is in the middle stage of Alzheimer's disease.

These actions can be upsetting and are often hard for caregivers to manage. It helps to have a plan. One that many people find easy to remember is called ABC. Here is what this means:

***A* means Antecedent.** This refers to events that happen just *before* an upsetting action.

***B* is the Behavior.** This means any upsetting or aggressive *action* done by the person who has Alzheimer's disease.

***C* refers to the Consequence.** This includes events that happen *after* the behavior. Sometimes, these events can make the situation worse.

Source: The Comfort of Home for Alzheimer's Disease: A Guide for Caregivers

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Taking Care of Yourself—Dependency and Isolation

Fears of dependency and loneliness, or isolation, are common in families of those who are ill, especially those with Alzheimer's. The person needing care can become more and more dependent on the one who is providing it. At the same time, the caregiver needs others for respite and support. Many caregivers are ashamed about needing help, so they don't ask for it. Those caregivers who are able to develop personal and social support have a greater sense of well-being.

Support group meetings are a place to express feelings—joy, sadness, anger or frustration—among a group of people who can listen and share similar experiences. It's a chance to meet others to exchange thoughts and resources. Ask your local religious organization, disease chapter, hospital or Area Agency on Aging if there is a support group near you or about starting one.

Inspiration

As long as I'm alive, I'll continue to try to understand more because the work of the heart is never done.
~ Muhammad Ali

Live Life Laughing!

Harold just can't get surfing out of his system.

Don't Fall – Be Safe

Due to changes in the brain that are caused by Alzheimer's disease, people with AD are at ***especially high risk*** of falling. Slower reaction time or difficulty recognizing changes in the height or depth of a step, for example, can lead to tripping and falling. Changes in balance and coordination combined with poor memory can make it difficult for a person with AD to get from one place to another and avoid hazardous objects at the same time.

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Caregiving in The Comfort of Home®

Our Purpose

To provide caregivers with critical information enabling them to do their job with confidence, pride, and competence.

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SAFETY TIPS—Dementia and Gun Safety

Put a plan in place as soon as a diagnosis is made, just as you might plan to remove a driver's license or a checkbook. A person with AD should not have access to guns. Depression is common among those with dementia and can increase the risk of suicide, especially if there is access to a firearm. Dementia affects one's ability to control emotions, which can result in bursts of unpredictable anger. In the early stages of the disease, include the person in the conversation. If the person is too confused for a discussion, it may be time to just confiscate the gun.

- ★ Don't simply remove bullets or disable the gun. Police officers will not be aware that the firearm is disabled and they could injure anyone holding it.
- ★ Remove holsters and other reminders of the gun.

Law enforcement and the doctor may provide advice. The Alzheimer's Association has counselors available 24/7: 1-800-272-3900. It offers guidance on how to minimize risks associated with firearms in homes where a person has dementia. Visit **www.alz.org** and search **Safety and the Right to Bear Arms**.

NEXT ISSUE… TRANSFERRING SAFELY

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"CARING FOR YOU...CARING FOR OTHERS"

QUICK QUIZ

Meaningful activities can reduce the risk that that the person with AD will become agitated or behave in ways that may upset him and others. People with dementia have difficulty planning and in choosing safe activities. You will have to choose the activity and create the physical and emotional environment in which the person with dementia can safely do it. Read the issue and answer True or False to the questions below.

1. All people with Alzheimer's become physically aggressive.
T F

2. Violent behavior may be the way this person is responding to changes in his brain or to events that he doesn't understand and interprets as dangerous.
T F

3. A situation in which the person with AD feels threatened will likely make him more upset.
T F

4. Restrain the person if he starts threatening you.
T F

5. Due to changes in the brain that are caused by Alzheimer's disease, people with AD are at *especially* high risk of falling.
T F

6. A person with Alzheimer's should not have access to guns.
T F

7. Dementia affects one's ability to control emotions, which can result in bursts of unpredictable anger, making it especially dangerous to have guns accessible.
T F

8. In the middle stage of Alzheimer's disease, a person may sometimes act in ways that seem aggressive.
T F

9. The doctor who conducted the diagnostic evaluation can help you know what activities are still safe to do.
T F

10. Changes in balance and coordination combined with poor memory can make it difficult for a person with AD to get from one place to another and avoid hazardous objects at the same time.
T F

Name_____

Signature_____ Date_____

KEY: 1. F; 2. T; 3. T; 4. F; 5. T; 6. T; 7. T; 8. T; 9. T; 10. T

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