

Living with Alzheimer's: A Caregivers Guide to Daily Activities

Daily activities that once were easy and thoughtless tasks become increasingly difficult for your loved one to accomplish once they have been diagnosed with Alzheimer's Disease. Bathing, eating, getting dressed and even using the bathroom can seem wearisome for your loved one and require plenty of patience on your part. By simply creating a routine that can be followed on a daily basis will add some structure to both of your lives. Here are some tips to consider as you and your loved one go through the day together:

Bathing

- Have everything set out before the start of the bath, including a dry washcloth to cover their eyes during shampooing and rinsing and be sure the room is warm.
- Have a large beach towel, shower blanket or a robe on hand to allow the person to cover up for privacy.
- Have your loved one sit on a shower bench, then fill the tub with a few inches of water, making sure that the temperature is agreeable for the person.
- Allow the person with Alzheimer's to do as much on their own as possible, giving step by step directions.
- Continue using products that the person is familiar with, like soaps, shampoos, perfume or cologne, this will help them remember what they do with each product.
- After the bath, be sure his/her body is dry before applying a baby powder or lotion to their skin.
- Look for any skin rashes, especially if the person doesn't move around often or is incontinent.
- It isn't necessary to take a bath everyday, instead substitute a sponge bath in between regular bath days.
- Use the "monkey see, monkey do" approach, where you do the activity and ask your loved one to imitate what you are doing, this can work for hair or teeth brushing.

Getting Dressed

- Provide clothes that are easy to get on and off, elastic and Velcro are better than buttons and zippers.
- If you notice that they like one or two outfits, buy a couple of sets of those outfits to keep clothing choices limited.
- Let them pick out the outfit they would like to wear, giving them two different options of outfits to choose from.
- Arrange the clothes in the order that they are to be put on.
- Give clear, simple directions. Show with example, such as put your left leg through the pant leg.
- Tell your loved one how pretty or handsome they are when finished dressing, this offers a confidence boost and can be a sign of encouragement.

Toileting/Managing Incontinence

- Help them get in the habit of going to the bathroom on a regular basis. For instance, have them use the bathroom every couple of hours, even if they aren't asking to go.
- Look for signs of pant-tugging, pacing or restlessness. These may be indicators of the need to use the bathroom.
- Be understanding if an accident does occur, don't scold and don't make a big scene of it, instead of saying "why couldn't you get to the bathroom?" try "I think you may have spilled something on your pants."
- If wetting the bed is problematic, watch the amount of fluid intake before bed time. It is best to limit how much is being consumed a couple of hours before going to bed to avoid accidents.
- Keep an [incontinence log](#) to document bathroom uses and urges.
- See a doctor to make sure that medications are not interfering with the ability to use the bathroom.
- Understand the [Type of Incontinence](#) your loved one has in order to help manage daily.

Eating

- Keep the table clear of tablecloths, placemats, papers, flowers, etc., they tend to serve as a distraction.
- Use plain colored (no design) dishes, serving one food at a time, not only will this help your loved one distinguish their food from their plate, but it won't overwhelm them by having a full plate of food.
- Switch to cups that have a lid and use straws that bend to encourage independence .
- Make foods that will be easy for them to eat on their own, this includes finger foods or foods that are easy to pick up with a fork or spoon to encourage independence.
- Cook food that they request, sometimes the food they once liked no longer appeals to them and they prefer to try new food instead.
- Be careful of the food temperature, making sure it is not too hot or cold.
- Make it a social gathering; invite a couple of people to come over for dinner. This will allow your loved one to look forward to meal times.
- After dinner is over, check their mouth to make sure all food has been swallowed to prevent choking.
- Learn the Heimlich maneuver in case of choking.

Memory loss & Communication

It is hard to watch a loved one forget how to do simple, day-to-day activities after they have been diagnosed with Alzheimer's. For as long as they can, it is healthy for them to live an independent life-style with your assistance. Create a "To Do" List with what needs to happen for the day to set structure. If your loved one still has the ability to complete tasks, write down step by step directions on how to accomplish the task. It is also best to have alarms in the house that remind your loved one it is time to take medications, or something has finished cooking. Also, display pictures and memorabilia (like a souvenir from a past vacation) near your loved one's favorite spot in their house as a reminder of their past.

Communication skills are a struggle for people living with Alzheimer's. It is important that you remain patient and let them know that you are listening. Look for alternatives to assisting in communication. For example, give them a pad of paper to write down words, letters or pictures of what they are trying to convey. If they are having trouble trying to come up with the right word, kindly suggest the word that they are trying to say.

When you want their attention, call them by name and wait for them to look at you. Eliminate any background noise like music or the television to help them focus on the conversation. Using short and simple sentences in a clear, soothing tone will help in understanding. When asking a question, wait for a response, don't be afraid to repeat or rephrase the question if they need clarification or don't answer. Remember, nonverbal communication can be the key to understanding as well.

Activities

It is important to keep doing activities and exercises that the person enjoys doing or simplify activities that they once used to participate in. By assessing what their skills are, and using the time of day they respond better to, you and your loved one can stay active together. Here are some ideas that you can use to help build a better quality of life:

- Paint with watercolors or color with crayons
- If they used to knit or crochet, find a simpler pattern for them
- Plant a garden together, be sure to use non-toxic plants in case of ingestion
- Finish a jigsaw puzzle, one with few and large pieces
- Try tossing a soft, cushy ball back and forth
- Go for a walk in the morning and make it creative by trying to spot pretty flowers or collecting the most unique looking leaves (please watch your loved one to be sure they don't eat them)
- Play music that was their favorite while growing up
- Bake together, having your loved one measure items
- Help clean the house, having them do the repetitive activities like sweeping
- Set up a bird house and watch the outside wildlife