

How to Care for Someone With Alzheimer's

Being sixth on the list for most common cause of death in the United States killing almost 84,000 people in 2010, Alzheimer's is a debilitating disease for not only the individual but for the family and friends around that person. Alzheimer's, as you probably know, is classified as an incurable, progressive form of dementia that causes problems with behavior, memory and thinking. What does this mean, you ask? Well, it means that once your loved one is diagnosed (usually after months or years of actually having the onset of symptoms) with the disease, that not much can be done. Sure there are medicines that can help slow down the progression of symptoms, but it is inevitable that your loved one will, one day, get worse. So how can **YOU** care for your loved one in the least stressful and positive way possible for them?

Alzheimer's is a tricky disease for people to deal with, including the individual, the family and even the doctors due to its nonlinear progression. The disease has no "timeline" and can go as fast or as slow, and varies with each individual. Researchers and doctors have come up with three approaches for dealing with someone who has Alzheimer's: Validation Therapy, Music Therapy and Reminiscence.

- **Validation:** *Enter their reality.* This is based off the idea that once the affected person has experienced short term memory loss and can no longer make sense of the present, they may resort back to long term memories, thus their past and making the past their new present. Some critiques of this approach come from care takers and family members who view this as lying to the person with Alzheimer's, but this is not true; you are merely not challenging their reality, thus maintain the affected person's self esteem and dignity. This approach avoids making the person upset/anxious and confusing more than they already are.
- **Music:** *Use music to alleviate stressful situations.* Music can be a great way to calm an affected individual, unlock memories, and bring them back to the present. Even after the person's motor functions have decreased, the person can still enjoy old familiar songs. Knowing a person's musical dislikes and likes is vital for the success of this approach as playing songs they do not like can upset them or bring back unwanted memories.
- **Reminiscence:** *Review past events.* This can be a great way to bring serenity to an affected individual by reflecting on their past. It helps the person remember their past and it also lets them know that you are interested in them and what they have done throughout their life. Be wary of using this approach if the person is not lucid or not in the present reality as this might confuse them and disturb their reality. Be mindful of the reactions they make and if any distress seems to be occurring. If it does, it might be best to use another approach to distract them.

By using one or a combination of these three approaches, you will be on your way to a better and less stressful life with your loved one. Now there will be times when the affected person will get upset, but just keep working with them and you will be glad that you did. You will help to put that person at ease, and you will feel rewarded knowing that you made their last moments as happy and fulfilling as possible!

References:

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