



**SENIOR SERVICES**  
Helping Our Elderly Live With Dignity

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## Assisting the Person with Alzheimer's Disease or Dementia in Daily Activities

People with Alzheimer's disease or related dementia can be challenged in performing daily activities and tasks. There are different stages of the disease, and it progresses at a different rate for each person. They may forget how to do simple, routine tasks. They may need to be reminded of each step (one step at a time), or you may have to imitate the task to show them what you are asking them to do. Remember, it's the disease that's causing the memory impairment. The following suggestions may help you in assisting your loved one in performing routine daily tasks.

### Problems with Bathing

Bathing can be frightening and confusing to someone with dementia. Plan the bath when the person is most relaxed. Get everything ready before you begin. Do one step at a time, and tell the person what you are going to do before you do it. Exercise patience, respect, and gentleness. Use a handheld showerhead, shower bench, grab bars and nonskid mats to minimize safety risks. Never leave your loved one unattended while taking a bath.

### Problems with Dressing

Try to establish a specific time each day for your loved one to get dressed. People with dementia like routines. Place the clothes in sight, and arrange them in the order they should be put on. Limit choices. Choose clothes that are comfortable and easy to manage. Do not rush your loved one in getting dressed. Encourage them to dress themselves or do what they can for themselves even if you have to guide them. You may have to assist with buttons and zippers. Velcro closures are sometimes preferred.

### Problems with Eating

Create a quiet atmosphere with limited distractions. This will help your loved one focus on the meal. Allow adequate time so you do not have to rush. Provide a limited number of choices, and serve small portions. Break tasks down into steps and communicate one step at a time. Instead of "would you like to come in, sit down and have a snack?" you could say "Come in here." "Please sit here." "Here's a snack for you."

Do not force your loved one to eat. Smaller meals or snacks may be preferred throughout the day rather than three big meals. Adapt foods to the person's needs. Choose foods that are soft and easy to chew and swallow. Finger foods may be preferred. Offer a spoon if there is food that easily falls off a fork such as beans or peas. Consider using a bowl instead of a plate or a plate with a rim.

## **Problems with Eating (cont.)**

Encourage your loved one to feed him or herself. A cue may be needed to get started such as putting the fork or spoon in their hand, or you may need to demonstrate eating by lifting a spoon to your mouth. You may have to start the person by putting food onto the spoon, gently placing your loved one's hand on it, and guiding it to his or her mouth. Your loved one may need you to remind them to chew and swallow.

## **Incontinence**

Watch for signs such as restlessness, facial expressions, or pulling at clothing that may indicate that your loved one may need to use the bathroom. Take the person to the bathroom on a schedule, for example, every 3 hours or before and after meals and just before bedtime. Give short, simple instructions, one step at a time. Make sure your loved one has finished before getting up. Fluid intake should be limited in the evenings to help prevent nighttime accidents. Use protective undergarments such as adult briefs during the day and at night.

Some people may use language such as "pee," "take a leak" or may substitute another unrelated word. Listen carefully. If an accident happens, be supportive and understanding being careful not to scold or embarrass. Keep track of when accidents happen to help plan ways to avoid them.

## **Problems with Sleeping**

Develop set times to go to bed and get up. Try to make sure it's the same time each day. Plan activity during the day so that your loved one is tired when it's time to go to sleep. Try to prevent daytime napping. If the person is highly fatigued during the day, try a short nap after lunch. Avoid caffeinated drinks in the evening. Some herbal teas or warm milk may be calming and help your loved one sleep. A light snack before bed may keep them from waking up during the night and feeling hungry. Make sure your loved one goes to the bathroom before going to bed. If darkness is frightening or disorienting, use nightlights in the bedroom, hallways, and bathroom.

## **Wandering**

Some people with dementia may get agitated and wander during the late afternoon/evening hours, referred to as "sundowning." To help with this, try closing blinds or curtains to shut out darkness. Turn on lots of lights. Try to distract by putting on music, turning on the TV, getting the person involved in an activity, going for a walk, or giving the person something to hold or fidget with. Minimize confusion and noise.