

Church Name

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DAILY CARE OF PERSONS WITH ALZHEIMER'S DISEASE

Definition Description of Alzheimer's Disease:

Alzheimer's disease is a progressive neurologic disease of the brain that leads to the irreversible loss of neurons and dementia. The clinical hallmarks of Alzheimer's disease are progressive impairment in memory, judgment, decision making, orientation to physical surroundings, and language. A definitive diagnosis can be made only at autopsy.

It is the behaviors and loss of the personality of the loved one that are the most stressful for the caregiver. As the disease progresses, the loved one may have behaviors of wandering or may resist the loss of control by creating battles over simple things. Common situations may be frightening. Understanding the point of view of the person with Alzheimer's disease is essential. There are physical effects of weakening and loss of balance, and inability to carry out past familiar tasks as the disease progresses. With any daily task and activities, the more older adults can do for themselves, the longer they will be able to retain physical abilities.

Guidelines for daily care:

- **Bathing:** Use the most familiar form of bathing. If the loved one usually bathed in a bath tub, this would be recommended. As this becomes too difficult for the caregiver or the older adult, a safer method must be used. A shower may be frightening due to the water spraying all over the body. The caregiver must get creative. Try a hand held shower-head on a low pressure, or try letting the older adult direct the spray. Please see all the recommendations on the NOAH **Guide for Bathing**. Frequency may be an issue. If the loved one was not a frequent bather, he or she will not be comfortable with daily bathing.
- **Personal Cleanliness:** Soiling occurs because of the loss of coordination, or loss of attention to body signals or the process of self-toileting. The caregiver can attend to cleaning the soiled area, but does not have to carry out a complete bath each time. Some types of baby wipes are recommended for cleaning body parts that get soiled from urine or stool mishaps. These are more hygienic and can be disposed of in the toilet. Also see NOAH **Toileting Guide**.
- **Battles:** The loss of control and personality changes may lead to battles especially over transition times such as time for a bath, time for a meal, or outing. Structuring these events so that the recipient can make as many of the decisions as possible is recommended. The time or sequence or place or method can all be options for the recipient to decide.
- **Communication and thinking:** Various types of stimulation are good for persons with Alzheimer's Disease to keep their thinking active and as long as they feel safe. Some suggestions are getting out to a different setting, continuing familiar tasks giving a lead role as long as possible, reading, and quiz or puzzle types of exercises. These will help the older adult communicate better, feel more at ease, and engage in less conflict.

This Topic Sheet is provided through the NOAH Project, a grant-funded project of the Faith Community Nurse Network of the Greater Twin Cities.

Wandering:

There are multiple reasons persons with Alzheimer's disease may wander, these are:

- Anxiety: They cannot recognize the people or places around them and panic.
- Forgetfulness: They have forgotten what they started out to do and are trying to remember.
- Medications: Some medications may decrease anxiety but also decrease inhibitions. Some medications may increase anxiety or cause some uncomfortable side effects.
- An Illness may be causing discomfort or some change.
- Need to fulfill a former role or obligation, e.g. child care, or going to work.
- Feelings they cannot process or express
- Need for exercise.

Tips in case of wandering:

- Keep some clothes with their scent around just in case the police need to use them in their search for your loved one.
- Have a recent photograph to assist police or other agencies who may be called on to search for the missing person.
- Remember the clothes your loved one is wearing that day so that you can inform the authorities if they need to be involved.
- Discreetly label the clothes of people with Alzheimer's with their home telephone number.

Tips to deter or cope with wandering:

- Place a dark colored mat by the front and any doors that exit outside.
- Paint external doors the same color as the walls, this camouflages them.
- Label internal doors with their function i.e. bathroom, bedroom. You can also label doors that you want to have out of bounds with labels such as 'Do Not Enter' or 'No'.
- Install warning alarms on external doors so that you can encourage free movement around your house or apartment but respond quickly day or night to the warning bells.
- You can design a garden or walking area that allows access outside but always leads the wandering person back to the house. This is great for people with Alzheimer's who are very restless or agitated and who like or need to walk a lot.

Reference: http://alzheimers.about.com/od/caregivers/a/wander_caregive.htm

Alzheimer's Disease: Helpful Resources and Books

Community Resources: On the FCNN web site go to the **NOAH** page, scroll down to the **Resources for Supporting Ministry of FCNs**, and access **Caregiver Resources**. You will find a list in Section IV on **Alzheimer's Disease, Dementia and Memory Loss** as well as government and other resources.

Books for practical care:

- Barrick, A. L., Rader, J., Hoeffler, B., & Sloane, P. D. (Eds.). (2002). *Bathing without a battle: Personal care of individuals with dementia*. New York, NY: Springer Publishing.
- Mace, N. L., & Rabins, P. V. (2006). *The 36-hour day: A family guide to caring for persons with Alzheimer's disease related dementing illnesses, and memory loss in later life (4th ed.)*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press.

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