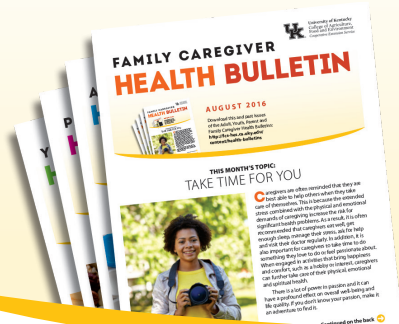


FAMILY CAREGIVER HEALTH BULLETIN



SEPTEMBER 2019

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THIS MONTH'S TOPIC: DEMENTIA-PROOF YOUR HOME



Alzheimer's disease (AD) is a progressive and destructive type of dementia. In the United States, approximately 5.8 million individuals live with AD; a number that is expected to rise to 14 million by the year 2050. (Alzheimer's Association, 2019).

Memory loss is a key symptom of the disease, but eventually, people living with AD will experience increased trouble with thinking and reasoning, decision-making, and performing familiar tasks. Changes in the brain will also affect mood, behavior, and personality (Alzheimer's Association, 2019).

A person with AD will become increasingly dependent on caregivers, who most often are family members. Caring for someone with AD can be emotional and overwhelming, especially as the disease progresses and more care and supervision is required.

Whether your loved one is still living in their home, has moved into your home, or is in a care facility, it is important that you modify the environment

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People living with dementia can adjust better to gradual changes versus sudden ones, which can be unsettling (AARP, 2017).

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appropriately as understanding and awareness change with the disease's progression.

When looking through a dementia lens, a person will see the world differently and often in a confused way, according to AARP (2017). For example, one's own reflection in a mirror may appear to be a stranger. A dark floor tile may look more like a hole that needs to be stepped over. The television may sound like burglars trying to get into the house. As a result, it is important to alter the environment to be safer and easier to navigate (AARP, 2017):

1. Contact your local Alzheimer's Association. They have resources and can recommend various health-care professionals and experts to assess your home and advise on safety issues.
2. Call your local extension agent to ask about the Virtual Dementia Tour from Second Wind Dreams. This dementia simulation uses an empathic model to help you better understand what the world might be like for someone living with dementia. You then will be more conscious of your loved one's point of view.
3. Review the AARP home safety checklist and then, starting in the front yard, go room by room taking notes about any adjustments you need to make.

https://assets.aarp.org/external_sites/caregiving/checklists/checklist_homeSafety.html

AARP (2017) also suggests these tips to make a home more dementia friendly:

- Reassess environmental and safety needs regularly. AD is a progressive, degenerative disease that causes needs and abilities to change over time, sometimes quickly.
- Think safety. For example, store hazardous materials in a locked cabinet. Limit the temperature on hot water, turn off stoves and ovens, and use childproof doorknobs, locks and outlet covers.
- Prevent falls. For example, assess clutter, evaluate transferability from chairs and beds, and install handrails in the bedrooms and bathrooms.



- Embrace technology. For example, use motion-sensors, alarms, cameras, and emergency response calls as needed or necessary.
- Patrol the pantry and refrigerator. Be sure that food is not spoiled or expired. Monitor what is being eaten to be sure that a whole jar of pickles is not eaten in one sitting. Be sure that pet food is locked up and not mistaken for a snack.
- Remove keys, firearms, and other dangerous or tempting objects

Remember, people living with dementia have trouble understanding and following directions. Families should make small adjustments over time — even while people are managing well. A person can adjust better to gradual changes versus sudden ones, which can be unsettling (AARP, 2017).

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