

# Caring for Someone with Alzheimer's Disease

## What to Do Every Day

Doing things we enjoy gives us pleasure and adds meaning to our lives. People with Alzheimer's disease need to be active and do things they enjoy. However, don't expect too much. It's not easy for them to plan their days and do different tasks.

Here are two reasons:

- They may have trouble deciding what to do each day. This could make them fearful and worried, or quiet and withdrawn.
- They may have trouble starting tasks. Remember, the person is not being lazy. He or she might need help organizing the day or doing an activity.

Help the person get started on an activity. Break the activity down into small steps and praise the person for each step he or she completes.

Simple activities often are best, especially when they use current abilities.

## Exercise and Physical Activity

Being active and getting exercise helps people with Alzheimer's disease feel better. Exercise helps keep their muscles, joints, and heart in good shape. It also helps people stay at a healthy weight and have regular toilet and sleep habits. You can exercise together to make it more fun.

You want someone with Alzheimer's to do as much as possible for himself or herself. At the same time, you also need to make sure that the person is safe when active.

Here are some tips for helping the person with Alzheimer's stay active.

- Take a walk together each day. Exercise is good for caregivers, too!
- Make sure the person with Alzheimer's has an ID bracelet with your phone number, if he or she walks alone.
- Check your local TV guide to see if there is a program to help older adults exercise.
- Add music to the exercises, if it helps the person with Alzheimer's. Dance to the music if possible.
- Watch exercise videos/DVDs made for older people. Try exercising together.
- Make sure he or she wears comfortable clothes and shoes that fit well and are made for exercise.
- Make sure the person drinks water or juice after exercise.
- Order the booklet "Workout to Go" from the National Institute on Aging. Call the Information Center at 1-800-222-2225 or visit [www.nia.nih.gov/Go4Life](http://www.nia.nih.gov/Go4Life).

## Healthy Eating

Eating healthy foods helps us stay well. It's even more important for people with Alzheimer's disease.

Here are tips for healthy eating when a person with Alzheimer's lives with you.

- Buy healthy foods such as vegetables, fruits, and whole-grain products. Be sure to buy foods that the person likes and can eat.
- Buy food that is easy to prepare, such as pre-made salads and single food portions.
- Have someone else make meals if possible.
- Use a service such as Meals on Wheels, which will bring meals right to your home. For more information, check your local phone book, or contact the Meals on Wheels organization at 703-548-5558 or visit [www.mowaa.org](http://www.mowaa.org). See [Meal Services](#) for more information about this service.

Here are tips for healthy eating when a person with early-stage Alzheimer's lives alone.

- Follow the steps above.
- Buy foods that the person doesn't need to cook.
- Call to remind him or her to eat.

In the early stage of Alzheimer's disease, the person's eating habits usually don't change. When changes do occur, living alone may not be safe anymore.

Look for these signs to see if living alone is no longer safe for the person with Alzheimer's.

- The person forgets to eat.
- Food has burned because it was left on the stove.
- The oven isn't turned off.

## Plan Enjoyable Activities

Plan activities that the person with Alzheimer's enjoys. He or she can be a part of the activity or just watch. Also, you don't always have to be the "activities director." For information on adult day care services that might help you, see [Adult Day Care Services](#).

Here are things you can do to help the person enjoy an activity.

- Match the activity with what the person with Alzheimer's can do.
- Choose activities that can be fun for everyone.
- Help the person get started.
- Decide if he or she can do the activity alone or needs help.
- Watch to see if the person gets frustrated.
- Make sure he or she feels successful and has fun.
- Let him or her watch, if that is more enjoyable.

The person with Alzheimer's can do different activities each day. This keeps the day interesting and fun. The following sections may give you some ideas.

## Household Chores

Doing household chores can boost the person's self-esteem. When the person helps you, don't forget to say "thank you." The person could

- wash dishes, set the table, or prepare food
- sweep the floor
- polish shoes
- sort mail and clip coupons
- sort socks and fold laundry
- sort recycling materials or other things.

## Cooking and Baking

Cooking and baking can bring the person with Alzheimer's a lot of joy. He or she might help:

- decide on what is needed to prepare the dish
- make the dish
- measure, mix, and pour
- tell someone else how to prepare a recipe
- taste the food
- watch others prepare food.

## Children

Being around children also can be fun. It gives the person with Alzheimer's someone to talk with and may bring back happy memories. It also can help the person realize how much he or she still can love others.

Here are some things the person might enjoy doing with children.

- Play a simple board game.
- Read stories or books.
- Visit family members who have small children.
- Walk in the park or around schoolyards.
- Go to sports or school events that involve young people.
- Talk about fond memories from childhood.

## Music and Dancing

People with Alzheimer's may like music because it brings back happy memories and feelings. Some people feel the rhythm and may want to dance. Others enjoy listening to or talking about their favorite music. Even if

the person with Alzheimer's has trouble finding the right words to speak, he or she still may be able to sing songs from the past.

Consider the following musical activities.

- Play CDs, tapes, or records.
- Talk about the music and the singer.
- Ask what he or she was doing when the song was popular.
- Talk about the music and past events.
- Sing or dance to well-known songs.
- Play musical games like "Name That Tune."
- Attend a concert or musical program.

## Pets

Many people with Alzheimer's enjoy pets, such as dogs, cats, or birds. Pets may help "bring them to life." Pets also can help people feel more loved and less worried.

Here are some suggested activities with pets.

- Care for, feed, or groom the pet.
- Walk the pet.
- Sit and hold the pet.

## Gardening

Gardening is a way to be part of nature. It also may help people remember past days and fun times. Gardening can help the person focus on what he or she still can do.

Here are some suggested gardening activities.

- Take care of indoor or outdoor plants.
- Plant flowers and vegetables.
- Water the plants when needed.
- Talk about how much the plants are growing.

**Source:** NIHSeniorHealth [nihseniorhealth@service.govdelivery.com](mailto:nihseniorhealth@service.govdelivery.com)