

# Caregiver Assistance News

“CARING FOR YOU...CARING FOR OTHERS”

## Alzheimer’s Disease & Difficult Behavior

### Hoarding and Clutter

In caring for someone with Alzheimer’s disease (AD), some behaviors are more difficult to deal with than others. You must learn to cope with the behavior and to keep yourself from burnout.

Your reaction depends on how you *interpret* the behavior. If you think of these behaviors as a way for the person with AD to communicate what she needs and feels, or what is upsetting her, you’ll be better able to respond calmly. Always take a moment to consider if the person in your care is ill, in pain, tired, or otherwise uncomfortable. Then, ask yourself if you are asking too much of him or her.

### Hoarding

Individuals with dementia are continuously losing parts of their lives—work, friends, family, and

memories. This can make them hoard to “keep things safe.” Hoarding can also be triggered by a fear of being robbed.

An uncluttered home is the ideal environment. But remember that safety and security are more important than perfection.

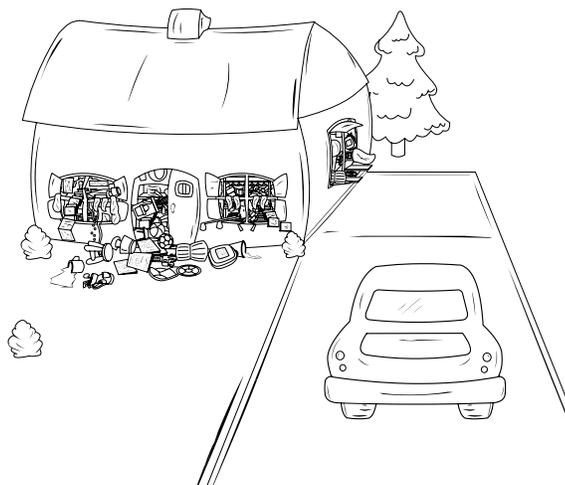
**Build trust.** Any changes you make to the home may cause a person with dementia to become very anxious.

**Safety first.** Check for fire hazards, fall hazards, and poisoning hazards. Keep things like cleaning fluids, plant soil, lotions, and medicines out of reach. Regularly check the refrigerator to make sure that old food is tossed. Because some frail adults hold onto furniture while moving through the home, make sure that these supports are stable.

### November Is National AD Awareness Month

- 65% of AD patients are women
- 60% of caregivers of AD patients are women
- One-third of all female caregivers care for somebody with AD 24/7

Source: *The Shriver Report* (Maria Shriver & The Alzheimer’s Association)



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**Minimize hiding places.** Lock unused closets or doors. For persons who are still able to read, put up signs that say “NO” or “STOP” where you don’t want them to go. Learn where the person tends to hide things.

**Limit valuables** or cash within reach.

**Keep junk mail to a minimum.**

Arrange for bills to be sent to someone else for payment.

**Remove nonessentials,** like out-of-season clothing.

**Understand coping mechanisms.**

Some people with dementia may keep belongings, including clothing, out in the open, so they know where they are. This may help them continue to function in the early or middle stages of the disease. They may be willing to put their belongings away if large signs on drawers, such as “Shirts,” help them find their possessions.

**Fill a drawer with “odds and ends”** for him to rummage through.

**Check wastebaskets for “lost” items** before they are emptied.

**Keep duplicates of important items** such as glasses, keys, etc.

**Remove discarded items**

**immediately.** If you are removing items from the person’s home, do so immediately. Otherwise, he may rummage through the garbage and bring them back into the house.

### Smoking Linked to Alzheimer’s

Smoking more than two packs of cigarettes daily from ages 50 to 60 increases risk of dementia later in life.

Source: WebMD Health News

## Cleaning Up Clutter

Discuss with the person in your care why the cleanout is needed (health dangers, eviction). Enlist her help, let her feel that she has some control over what is happening. Go slowly. Even if you are only able to clear one small table or a corner of a room, the person’s well-being and sense of control are more important than perfect cleanliness.

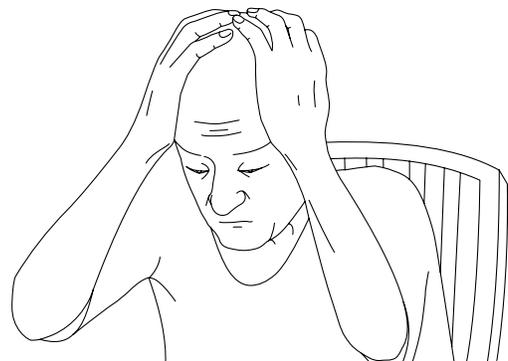
Source: From Weill Medical College of Cornell University; New York Presbyterian; the University Hospital of Columbia and Cornell

## Screaming Fits

People with dementia often have a phase of screaming fits. First, ask a doctor to check for any physical reason for the screaming. Note if there is any pattern to the screaming, such as just around mealtimes.

If no *physical* cause is found, it is probable that the person just feels bewildered. Try to keep calm and make him feel loved and supported. If the screaming persists, he may need a small amount of sedation from the doctor, as well as plenty of comfort from you. Usually, this distressing phase passes, and the sedation can be stopped.

Source: [www.alzheimers.org.uk](http://www.alzheimers.org.uk)



## Taking Care of Yourself—Caregiver Burnout Checklist

Ask yourself the following questions and seek professional help if you answer Yes to most questions.

- |    |  |     |    |
|----|--|-----|----|
| 1  | What are your expectations? Are they realistic? Are you expecting the person with AD to get better or to always be pleasant because of all the time and concern you put into his care? | Yes | No |
| 2  | Do you wish he would show gratitude?   | Yes | No |
| 3  | When expected help does not come through, do you get disappointed and try to do everything yourself?   | Yes | No |
| 4  | Are you feeling tired, isolated, helpless, angry, resentful, or guilty?  | Yes | No |
| 5  | Are you physically ill yourself and not going to the doctor or following the doctor's instructions about how to care for yourself?   | Yes | No |
| 6  | Have you stopped making time for yourself, to refuel and nourish your own interests and friendships?   | Yes | No |
| 7  | Are you using destructive ways of coping, such as alcohol, overeating, or misusing drugs?  | Yes | No |
| 8  | Have you caught yourself calling him bad names?  | Yes | No |
| 9  | Do you want to scream at him?  | Yes | No |
| 10 | Are you afraid you may hurt him?   | Yes | No |

## Live Life Laughing!

We are so grateful for the many things that did not happen today.



## Don't Fall – Be Safe

Be sure to have the proper snow shoes or boots when walking outside.

## Good Manners – Visits

During the holidays, you might wonder if it really matters whether or not you visit someone with AD, since the person will forget you were even there. While the visit may be forgotten almost immediately, the warm emotions created by the visit may linger long after you've left.

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## **Reassure, Don't Argue**

Memory loss and confusion may cause the person with AD to perceive things in new, unusual ways. Individuals may become suspicious of others, even accusing them of theft or infidelity. The person may also misinterpret what he or she sees and hears.

- **Don't take offense.** Listen to what is troubling the person, and try to understand that reality. Be reassuring, and let the person know you care.
- **Don't argue or try to convince.** Allow her to express ideas. Acknowledge her opinions.
- **Don't correct everything,** especially if it's not important or inconsequential.
- **Offer a simple answer.** Share your thoughts, but keep it simple. Don't overwhelm her with lengthy explanations.
- **Switch focus to another activity.** Engage her in an activity, or ask her for help with a chore.

*Source: The Comfort of Home for Alzheimer's Disease; Alzheimer's Association [www.alz.org](http://www.alz.org)*

# Caregiver Assistance News

“ C A R I N G F O R Y O U . . . C A R I N G F O R O T H E R S ”

## Q U I C K Q U I Z

Keeping hoarding under control can be a challenge for caregivers. When cleaning out clutter, work at the person's pace. Some people cannot tolerate even a half hour of clearing in the beginning. Answer True or False to the questions below.

1. If you think of difficult behaviors as a way for the person with AD to communicate what she needs and feels, or what is upsetting her, you'll be better able to respond calmly.  
T F
2. People with dementia sometimes hoard to “keep things safe.”  
T F
3. Changes to the home environment will not make the person with dementia become anxious.  
T F
4. Some people with dementia may keep belongings, including clothing, out in the open so they know where they are.  
T F
5. Frail adults hold onto furniture while moving through the home, so it important that these supports are stable.  
T F
6. If a person with dementia has screaming fits, the reason could not be physical.  
T F
7. Although people with dementia quickly forget a visit, they may remember the *emotions* the visit created.  
T F
8. Memory loss and confusion may cause a person with AD to perceive things in new or unusual ways.  
T F
9. Try to convince the person with AD with lengthy explanations.  
T F
10. When clearing out clutter, check for safety first, especially fire and fall hazards.  
T F

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_