

# Caregiver Assistance News

“CARING FOR YOU... CARING FOR OTHERS”

## Preparing a Safe Home

### Alzheimer's Care—Focus on Accident Prevention

Your goal in adapting the home for a person with Alzheimer's disease (AD) is to keep the surroundings as familiar as possible, while making the changes necessary to create a home that is calming, reassuring, safe, and supportive. This will make it possible for the person with dementia to be as independent as possible.

#### Creating a Safe Home

Creating a safe home environment for a person with Alzheimer's disease requires changes that would be made for any older person. Also consider any physical or mental disabilities he or she has that are unique to AD and try to plan ahead for future difficulties.

The environment should be suitable for the symptoms of the disease—

- ✓ Memory loss
- ✓ Confusion about where he is
- ✓ Confusion about how to get to or find a particular room
- ✓ Decreased judgment
- ✓ Tendency to wander
- ✓ Poor impulse control
- ✓ Changes in vision, hearing, depth perception
- ✓ Sensitivity to changes in temperature

You can't predict every need that will come along. AD symptoms get worse as time goes on. In the early

stage it causes mostly thinking (cognitive) difficulties. Eventually it causes physical decline as well. In the late or severe stage, the loss of abilities, such as walking, has a major effect on how much care will be needed. Features of the home, such as steps and narrow bathroom doors, can become major obstacles to providing care.



#### Make Changes Slowly

Not all changes to the home need to be made at once. Remember that it is difficult for a person with AD to adjust to changes in the environment. For this reason, it may be best to make some changes when the person is in the early stage of the illness and will have the easiest time getting used to them.

If you are making changes to a home, be aware and sensitive to what these possessions mean to the elderly person and proceed with sensitivity.

## The Kitchen

The kitchen is filled with potential trouble spots. A person who is used to cooking may want to continue to do so but forget to turn off the flame when the food is done, may make the flame too high, or may not position pots safely on the stove top. At first, simply keeping close watch may be enough to reduce these risks. In time, as the disease progresses, it may be necessary to remove the knobs from the stove or to cover them so the person in your care will not notice them.



- Remove all items that cause confusion.
- Disguise the garbage disposal switches.
- Put all the garbage out of sight.
- Put labels on the cabinets.
- Install a shut-off valve (for a gas stove) or a circuit breaker for an electric stove so you can disable it when you leave the kitchen.
- Remove burner knobs and tape the stems or install knob covers.
- Use a lock-out switch on the electric range so it can't be turned on except by you.
- Use an aluminum cover over the top of the stove, or use burner covers.
- Replace the pilot on a gas stove with an electric starter.
- Lock the oven door.
- Use safety latches on doors and cabinets.
- Install gates, door, or dutch doors so the kitchen can be closed off but you can still see and be seen.
- Install an automatic turn-off on the faucet.
- Install a governor on the hot water faucet (or turn down the valve under the sink) to control the amount of water that can be used.
- For a faucet spout that swings outside the sink itself, install a brace that keeps water in the sink at all times.
- Hide or get rid of dangerous small appliances.
- Turn off appliances by unplugging them, turning off circuit breakers, or removing fuses.
- Install smoke detectors (but not near the stove).
- Use an electric teakettle that has an automatic shutoff.
- Use a single-lever faucet that can balance water temperature.
- Provide an area away from the knife drawer and the stove where the person in your care can help prepare food.
- Ask the gas company to modify your stove to provide a gas odor that is strong enough to alert you if the pilot light goes out.
- Provide a step stool, never a chair, to reach high shelves.

## Taking Care of Yourself—No Nightcaps for Better Sleep

Alcohol helps you fall asleep quickly and deepens sleep initially, but later on it disrupts sleep and causes middle-of-the-night wake-ups. Overall, it produces unsettled sleep. High doses of alcohol worsen sleep more in women. It's not surprising that there's a gender effect at night, since women metabolize alcohol differently than men. The stomach enzyme that breaks down alcohol before it reaches the bloodstream is less active in women. This allows **more** alcohol to enter the blood. Women also end up with higher blood alcohol levels because they tend to be smaller and have proportionately less body water than men (alcohol is diluted in body water). Alcohol's effects on sleep may be even worse in older people and those with sleep problems. Don't use alcohol to help you sleep.

Source: Berkeley Wellness Alerts



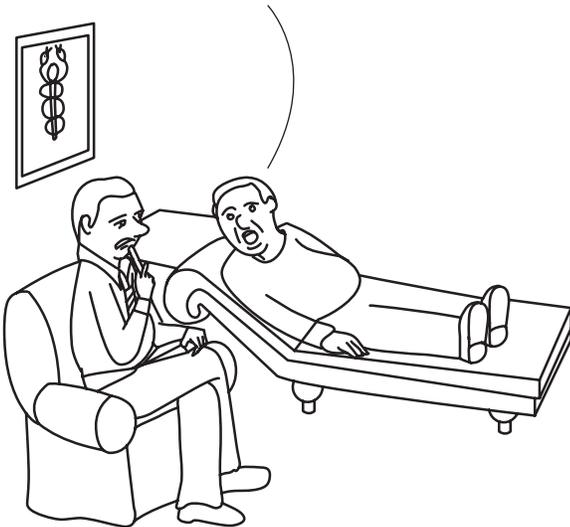
## Inspiration

*Never question the meaning of taking a few steps backwards. After all, dancing through life gracefully requires a full range of motion.*

~ Ruth Marcus PhD

## Live Life Laughing!

I am having an out-of-money experience.



## Don't Fall—Be Safe

To help avoid taking a misstep, you can paint wooden or concrete steps with a strip of contrasting color on the edge of each step or on the top and bottom steps. Don't rush going up or down stairs. Rushing is a major cause of falls.

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## **SAFETY TIPS – Outdoor Areas**

Safe outdoor areas are important, especially for those who are confused and are mobile. Safety features should include the following:

- ramps for access on ground that is not level or even
- a deck with a sturdy railing
- outside doors locked or alarmed
- a key hidden outside
- enough light to see walkway hazards at night
- nonslip step surfaces in good repair
- stair handrails fastened to their fittings
- step edges marked with reflective paint
- a hedge or fence around the yard and dangerous areas like pools or streams

In addition, unplug or remove power tools.

NEXT ISSUE... EMERGENCIES – BE READY

# 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

Creating a safe home has many aspects including making a list of vital care information—the person’s doctor, medications, insurance information—and putting it on the refrigerator—for emergency workers. Answer True or False to the questions below.

1. Creating a safe home environment for a person with Alzheimer’s requires changes that would be made for any older person, but you should also consider any physical or mental disabilities he or she has that are unique to AD.  
T F
2. The environment should be set up to be suitable for the symptoms of AD.  
T F
3. AD symptoms get worse as time goes on; in the early stage it causes mostly thinking (cognitive) difficulties.  
T F
4. People with AD are sometimes confused about how to find a particular room.  
T F
5. Having an alcoholic drink before bed will help with a good night’s sleep.  
T F
6. As AD progresses, it is never necessary to remove the knobs from the stove or to cover them so the person in your care will not notice them.  
T F
7. People with AD do *not* experience changes in sensitivity to temperature.  
T F
8. Rushing is a major cause of falls.  
T F
9. Not all changes to the home have to be made at once.  
T F
10. When making changes to a home, it is important to be aware and sensitive to what these possessions mean to the elderly person and proceed with sensitivity.  
T F

Name \_\_\_\_\_

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