

Learning To Live With Alzheimer's Disease

(NAPSA)—Perhaps more than many other diseases, an Alzheimer's diagnosis affects family and loved ones in many profound ways. It will mean major changes in relationships and difficulties with previously routine activities. Considering that one in 10 Americans has a family member with Alzheimer's disease and that one in three knows someone with the disease, learning to live with Alzheimer's disease is something that tens of millions of Americans must face every day.

In the early stages of Alzheimer's disease, patients often struggle to maintain their independence, while caregivers, family members and close friends find it difficult to accept changes the patient is going through. Recognizing the patient's changing abilities and learning to make the most of these limitations can help both the caregiver and patient better live with the disease, rather than be defeated by it.

"Understanding what your loved one is experiencing and learning to adapt your lifestyle is crucial to creating a positive living environment for both the patient and caregiver," explained Joanne Koenig Coste, renowned Alzheimer's care pioneer and author of *Learning to Speak Alzheimer's*. "You can't allow yourself to be weighed down by the diagnosis. Recognize your loved one's changing abilities and together, learn to make the most of what he or she is still able to do."

Since a person with Alzheimer's disease will live an average of eight years after the onset of symptoms, it's important for caregivers, family members and friends to help their loved one make those years as happy and productive as possible. While there aren't any one-size-fits-all approaches, the following tips can help.



Stay focused on the positive. Staying focused on the skills and abilities that remain is more productive and less frustrating than focusing on those that may be lost. If your mother always baked cookies but isn't able to work the oven or mixer anymore, let her help by measuring and adding the ingredients.

Live in their world. Encouragement and patience will reduce frustration and make the patient feel supported. "Living in the patient's world, no matter what place in time they think it is, will create harmony," Koenig Coste said. "For example, if the patient thinks it is 1950 and is sharing a story in that moment, don't try to correct or convince him or her otherwise. Simply share in the joy of that moment with the patient."

Keep it simple. Start with the patient's physical space. Simplify his or her environment and minimize distractions. Reduce exposure to harsh light and sounds, which may become more disturbing to Alzheimer's patients.

Don't stop communicating. No matter how difficult it may become or how confused the patient may appear, communication is important. Listen carefully and try to understand what is being said, even if it does not seem to make sense and try not to interrupt. Speak slowly and clearly and use short, simple and familiar words. Break tasks and instruc-

tions into clear, simple steps and ask only one question at a time. Using nonverbal cues such as maintaining eye contact, pointing and touching can help make the patient feel understood.

Help the patient maintain as much independence as possible. The feeling of being able to do something for oneself—even if it's as simple as getting dressed in the morning or buttering one's own toast—encourages a sense of independence and confidence. It doesn't really matter if his socks don't match or if she gets butter on the tablecloth. What's most important is your loved one's self-esteem.

When your loved one is first diagnosed, ask his or her physician about treatment options that may help maintain day-to-day activities. A recent study published in the July issue of the *Journal of the American Geriatrics Society* suggests that treatment with the drug Reminyl® (galantamine hydrobromide) may help to maintain the ability of patients with Alzheimer's disease to carry out certain daily activities such as grooming, walking and being aware of current events.

Reminyl is indicated for the treatment of mild to moderate Alzheimer's disease. The most frequent adverse events are nausea, vomiting, diarrhea, anorexia and weight loss. They are usually mild and temporary. For more information, visit www.reminyl.com.

Last, don't forget about yourself. There are many resources to support those caring for someone with Alzheimer's disease. One such program is called SharingCare. It provides customized information to caregivers of Alzheimer's patients and their health care teams. For more information, visit www.SharingCare.com.