Creating A Dementia-Friendly Home: Solutions to Activities of Daily Living

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What are Activities of Daily Living?

Basic self-care tasks- activities of everyday life
• Includes feeding, toileting, selecting proper attire, putting on clothes and bathing

More complex activities
• Includes shopping, preparing meals, managing medication and finances, housework, handling transportation and using the telephone
Dementia & Executive Function

Dementias, such as Alzheimer’s disease, frontal dementia and other related dementias, lead to a progressive decline in executive function.

This affects one’s level of success in carrying out activities of daily living.
Executive Functioning

What is *executive function*
Brain-controlled functions that guide various functions of the body such as planning, solving problems, organizing and directing the body to carry out daily activities.

Executive function involves:
- developing initiatives (initiating an activity)
- making appropriate decisions
- considering consequences
- working memory (info. stored temporarily to complete a task - phone #)
- prioritizing
- paying attention (and not being distracted)
- focusing on important details
- working toward a goal
- shifting (to the next steps of a task or to the next task)
- stopping a finished action or task
Initiation

What happens when you can’t remember how to begin the first step of so many activities.

Making a peanut butter and jelly sandwich
What do you pick up first?
the knife?
the bread?
the jar of peanut butter?
Making a Peanut Butter & Jelly Sandwich

What are the steps involved?

What judgment/decision making is needed?

Where are you going to make the sandwich?
PB & J – Sample Steps

Setup:
1 Loaf of Sliced Bread  1 Jar Peanut Butter  1 Standard Butter Knife  1 Jar Jelly

Prep: 1) Take out two slices of bread from the loaf and set aside. 2) Take out plate

Steps:
• 1. Take the first slice of bread.
• 2. Open the jar of peanut butter by twisting the lid counter clockwise.
• 3. Pick up a knife by the handle.
• 4. Insert the knife into the jar of peanut butter.
• 5. Take the knife from the jar of peanut butter and run it across the slice of bread.
• 6. Take a second slice of bread.
• 7. Repeat steps 2-5 with the second slice of bread and the jar of jelly.
• 8. Press the two slices of bread together so the peanut butter and jelly meet.
• 9. Put sandwich on a plate to eat
• 10. Cut sandwich in half
Major Concepts in Helping Someone with Dementia in ADLs
Major Concept #1: No Blah Blah Blah Blah

“Forget all the wordy explanations.

If a person living with dementia can't remember three simple words after a minute or two, they are not going to understand or remember your long winded explanation of why they should or need to take a shower.

When the time comes, walk up to them slowly, get their attention, smile and wait until you receive a smile back.

Then stick out your hand, palm up, and wait for them to take it.”

excerpt from Alzheimers Reading Room
Major Concept #2: Be A Guide

Act as a guide to help the person remember how to do a task.
Sometimes when you can help someone begin a task, they can do other parts of the task themselves.
Be a Guide
Emotional memory is the memory of the feelings associated with an event, as opposed to the facts of the event. Emotional memory is a persisting asset of persons with Alzheimer’s Disease.

In many ways, the person with Alzheimer's disease’s emotional sensitivity is enhanced. This means that the person tends to communicate more on an emotional level.

The person is very aware of the emotions and moods of others, and often very susceptible to picking up these moods.
Main Concept #4: Adapt the Environment

It is more effective to change the environment than to change most behaviors.

Often it is the environment itself that creates unnecessary disabilities and behaviors.

Seemingly insignificant home features, such as poor lighting or lack of color contrast, can have powerful and disabling effects.
Main Concept #5: If at first you don’t succeed....

Take a break, take a deep breath and try again later
(except skydiving)
Communication Tips & ADLs

1. **Speak slowly** – it takes the person more time to understand and respond.

2. **Use encouraging, not negative words or commands**

3. **Don’t talk from behind the person**

4. **Make eye contact**

5. **Be at their level.** If the person is in a wheelchair, kneel down, sit beside them

4. **Use Visual Cues:** Point, touch or hand them the item you want them to use.

5. **Don’t talk so much**- Use simple but specific verbal directions

6. **Move slowly and calmly** – rushing a person can trigger agitation.

7. **Smile a lot** – it can help reduce the person's stress (and yours)

8. **Palms up: Never sit with your arms crossed.** This tends to convey anger just as it does when interacting with a person who does not have dementia.
DINING
Better Mealtimes

Common Problems

• Cluttered tabletops
• Excessive/busy pattern
• Hard to use dinnerware
• Hard to eat food items, such as large sandwiches
• Uncomfortable furnishings
Better Mealtimes: An uncluttered table

• An uncluttered table can help a person focus on eating.

• Store bills, newspapers, and other clutter in another location.

• If a person is confused by the condiments – for example, puts salt in tea and sugar on meat, put labels on the condiments or remove them from the table altogether.
Clutter

Bad

Good
Better Mealtimes: Use Color Contrast
Better Mealtimes: Easy to use dinnerware

The right utensils can increase a person's ability to feed him/herself, or make assisted feeding easier.

**Gripping Problems** - Large handles are easier to hold.

**Tremors** - Weighted utensils can steady a person's hand

**Sensitive Gums** - Use plastic coated spoons

- **Confusion Over Utensils** - Use a spoon if there is confusion to which utensil to use, as it is easier than eating with a fork.

- **Finger Foods** - Finger foods can be a lifesaver for those who find utensils difficult to use.
Better Mealtimes: Plates & Placemats

Plates

Use color contrast: Use plates that highlights the food being served. Ex: Chicken is easier to see against a dark-blue plate than a white plate. "Scoop" dishes provide a special edge that keeps food from sliding off the plate, and helps make putting food on the utensil easier.

Placemats help define the eating area

• Non-slip placements help keep plates from sliding. You can buy them or make your own from a roll sold at local home, bed, and bath stores.
• Make sure the placemat contrasts with the table and the plate.
• Avoid patterns on plates, placemats, and tablecloths to minimize distractions.
Better Mealtimes: Food Choice and Presentation

People with dementia, depending on their stage, will experience eating difficulties when served large portions (big sandwiches), servings that have not been cut up (chicken breast), or hard-to-chew items (meat).

These difficulties can be overcome easily with a bit of experimentation. This is one of the easiest and most effective mealtime interventions you can make.
Food Tips

**Smaller Portions**: Small portions or food items served one at a time are less overwhelming.

**Cut-up items**: Food items such as a large chicken breast or long green beans will be too difficult to eat. Cut food into bite size pieces before serving or serve food that can be "cut" with a fork.

**Bite size items**: Finger or bite-sized foods can be eaten independently by many individuals, such as:

- "Tea" sandwiches
- Potato wedges
- Cherry tomatoes
- Chicken fingers
- Cheese cubes
- Fish sticks

**Note**: Square, rectangular and triangular shapes are easier to hold than circular shapes.

**Tasty Sauces**: Putting tasty sauces on food is very individualized but may increase food intake.
A person with dementia may develop a poor appetite or lose interest in food. This can cause weight loss and a dip in their overall well-being.

A poor appetite may develop for numerous reasons:
- a change in food preferences
- difficulties chewing and swallowing
- self feeding coordination problems
- constipation or depression
Cups and Glasses

Research shows that cups and glasses in bright colors may increase liquid intake.

To increase visibility, contrast the cup's color from the beverage served. For example, serve milk in a dark blue cup.

Purchase cups that are a good size. Some cups are too big and cannot be grasped easily.

For people with reduced grip and hand strength, use a 2-handle cup with a spill-proof lid and colorful bendable straws. This may also help a person who has forgotten how to drink from an ordinary glass.
Better Mealtime: Proper seating

- A **comfortable chair** with side arms will make getting in and out of the chair easier. The person's feet should be flat on the floor/stool.

- Sit as close to the table as possible.

- For wheelchair users, transfer to a dining chair if possible. If remaining in wheelchair, remove/put down side arms.

- If the person is distracted by something in his or her view, change the seat to face another direction.
DRESSING
Finding & Choosing the Right Clothes

• Label drawers with words or pictures (e.g., underpants).

• If possible, move majority of clothes to another location. Leave only a few items in closet.

• Ask - but limit - choices: "Would you like to wear your green or white shirt?"
For More Independent Dressers

Leave out clothes to be worn that day
• On a wall hook.
• On the bed, in the order in which they are to be worn.
• In a pile, with the first item to be put on at the top.

For example, place underwear on top of their pants.

Place their clothes directly within his/her field of vision.
If They Can't Dress Independently

Choose comfortable easy-to-get-on-and-off clothing
• pants with elastic waists
• blouses with large armholes
• velcro enclosures or large buttons

Zippers and small buttons (or any buttons) may be too difficult for the person to maneuver.

If your care receiver uses a wheelchair, look for pants and dresses that are designed to be put on while the person is sitting down.
Dressing Tips

When Assisting
Don't rush! Rushing a person with dementia is a known trigger for agitation.

Break dressing into simple steps as needed.
• Hand each clothing item in the order it's to be put on.
• Demonstrate the action you want the person to do.
• Give simple, step-by-step instructions. "Put your left leg in the pant hole."
• Point to the pant hole or the person's leg.
• Gently tap the person's leg if needed.
• Give the person plenty of time to respond.
• Physically assist, if necessary. Begin (initiate) the action (i.e. pull sleeve over hand) and allow the person to continue dressing on his/her own.
• Smile and give praise - limit general conversation during dressing so that the person can attend without distraction.
If Person Refuses to Undress

Privacy Issues

• Thinking there are "people in the room" - turn any photographs over and/or the television off (people with dementia may think they're real people).
• Draw the blinds and close the bedroom door, even if there's no one around. It helps create a sense of boundary/privacy.

Other Strategies

• Show clothes you want them to wear. This may help understanding why they need to remove their clothes.
• Offering an inviting reason for getting dressed, such as a walk outside.
• If they refuse to undress at bedtime, allow them to sleep in their clothes.
• Buy 2-3 of the same clothing item. When they're bathing, swap in fresh clothing.
• Keep room temperature warm enough for disrobing.
• When resistant, stop activity & redirect attention to something pleasant. Try again.
BATHING
Bathing a person with Alzheimer's or other types of dementia can be a highly stressful activity for the caregiver.

It can also be an emotionally demanding experience for the person with Alzheimer's or other types of dementia, who may be especially stressed by

- fear of running water
- discomfort from cold drafty rooms
- embarrassment at being seen naked
- fear of falling – especially when moving in or out of the tub
- confusion due to memory problems

The person may think he or she has already bathed – or may be simply overwhelmed by the bathing process itself, no longer understanding how or what to do.
Bathing- Fear of Running Water

People with dementia are hypersensitive to water flowing onto their scalp or into their eyes. It's the main cause of agitation when bathing.

• Use a handheld shower hose with a gentle spray. **First** aim the water at the person's feet and legs. **Don't** start the shower with the water aimed at the person's face or head.
Bathing - Discomfort with cold

Warm up the room beforehand
• Close open windows, turn on space heater for a few minutes, etc.

Other ways to get the bathroom ready:
• Remove unnecessary items to reduce distraction
• Check the water temperature
• Set a relaxing mood - music, natural fragrances
• Have washing supplies & towels ready
• A bath mat on the floor by the tub makes the floor warmer
Bathing - Fear of Falling

• A colorful contrasting towel on the seat can help reduce fear of falling for individuals with depth perception issues

• Use adapted equipment - grab bars, tub seats

• Use a non-slip colored mat
TOILETING
Toilet- Common Problems & Solutions

Forgets to flush/Use Toilet Paper
• Outlining the toilet tissue holder with bright tape to increase notice
• Reminder signs for may be helpful if the person can still read and comprehend. Use simple language

Misses Toilet Bowl
• Use color contrast
  Tinted blue water in bowl may improves aim for men
  Contrasting colors for the toilet seat/lid help visibility
Toilet- Common Problems & Solutions

Puts Used Tissue in Waste Basket

Some individuals refuse to place used paper in the toilet, believing the wastebasket is the correct way. Replace the wastebasket with a diaper pail that has a cover to help contain unpleasant odors.

Finding The Bathroom

Some individuals may not be able distinguish the bathroom door from the surrounding doors. Or they may have forgotten where the bathroom is located.

Place large sign on door
Paint door a bright color
Leave light on in bathroom hallway
Toilet- Common Problems & Solutions

Comfort and Accessibility Features
• Padded seat and lid
• Raised toilet seat and grab bars
• Use color contrast for toilet seat, grab bars
• Use non glare lighting

Forgets steps such as pulling down pants/underwear
• Use visual cues
The End
Excellent Caregiver Blog
Alzheimers Reading Room
http://www.alzheimersreadingroom.com/

Interactive Website on all aspects of Dementia Home Care
http://www.thiscaringhome.org/virtual_home/
Several excerpts and photos from this website were included in this powerpoint presentation. The website also includes lots of information on useful products.
Vendors & Catalogs

North Coast Medical
“Stay At Home” and “Functional Solutions” Catalogs
https://www.ncmedical.com/item_3290.html#!prettyPhoto
Tel: 800-821-9319

Personal Touch Health Care Apparel
http://www.nursinghomeapparel.com/shop/index.html
Tel: 888-626-1703