



# Day-to-Day Tasks

Many caregivers must help the people they care for perform activities of daily living that most of us do on our own without much thought. This degree of dependency can be stressful for both the person with Alzheimer's disease and the caregiver. But with some planning and helpful pointers, you may be able to make these daily activities easier to perform and less stressful. We have included specific tips on the following daily activities:

- Eating
- Dressing
- Bathing
- Toileting
- Communicating
- Driving

Keep in mind that planning—and adhering to—a routine is essential since change may confuse a person with Alzheimer's disease. However, it's important to be prepared for unexpected events that can disrupt even your best planning. You can further ensure success if you schedule everyday tasks for times when the person with Alzheimer's disease is at his/her best.

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## Maintaining a healthy diet

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As with everyone, proper nutrition is important to overall good health. It's important to keep a few simple rules in mind when it comes to a person with Alzheimer's disease:

- **Keep mealtime calm and comfortable.** Avoid noise and distractions such as television. Also, bring out only those utensils needed for the meal being served
- **Offer only one food at a time.** Having more than one food at a time requires the person to make a choice, which can be confusing. For example, serve a vegetable dish followed by a meat dish
- **Try different or new foods.** Even though someone with Alzheimer's disease may have had a favorite food or meal for years, he/she may now prefer other foods. You may need to try different or new foods to see what he/she likes
- **Beware of foods that can cause choking.** Avoid foods that are difficult to chew
- **Use straws or cups with lids.** This helps make drinking easier
- **Try finger foods.** Certain foods can be eaten with fingers if using utensils is difficult. Using bowls instead of plates may also help
- **Offer a healthy snack.** Have snacks on hand so that they can be eaten when the person gets hungry
- **Allow enough time for meals.** A person with Alzheimer's disease may need about 1 hour to properly finish a meal. Don't rush him/her or force him/her to eat. You may consider serving several smaller meals throughout the day rather than 3 big meals
- **Encourage him/her to feed himself/herself.** You may need to get him/her started by lifting your own spoon to your mouth or placing your hand over his/hers and raising it to his/her mouth
- **Keep close tabs on his/her weight.** Weight loss could mean several things, including inadequate food intake, an illness, or the side effects of medication. If weight loss continues, talk to his/her doctor



## Dressing the person with Alzheimer's disease

There are many challenges for someone with Alzheimer's disease: choosing what to wear, struggling with buttons and zippers, putting clothes on, and taking them off. To help him/her with dressing, consider these tips:

- **Encourage independence.** As much as possible, have the person with Alzheimer's disease dress himself/herself. Allow for extra time so that he/she doesn't feel pressured
- **Organize the process.** Lay out clothing in the order it should go on. Give short, simple instructions such as "Put on your shirt"
- **Choose comfortable, simple clothing.** Shirts and blouses that button down the front may be easier to put on and take off than pullovers. You can also substitute Velcro for buttons, snaps, or zippers where possible. Use comfortable, nonslip footwear
- **Limit choices.** Offer the person just a few choices in pants and shirts. Keep closets free of excess clothing. If the person has a favorite outfit, consider buying 2 or 3 identical sets
- **Keep to a routine.** Have the person get dressed at the same time every day. The person will come to expect it as part of the daily routine

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## Making bathing less stressful

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This is usually the most difficult activity you and the person you care for will have to do on a regular basis. It's an intimate experience that may make the person feel threatened, uncomfortable, or frightened. In some cases, a caregiver may even get in the shower with the person to help him/her feel more secure. The following tips may help make bathing go more smoothly:

- **Try both showers and baths.** Some people may do better with one or the other. Do some experimenting to find out whether he/she prefers a bath or shower and what time of day is best to bathe
- **Get prepared.** Gather all items you will need beforehand, such as towels, washcloths, soap, and shampoo
- **Have the person involved in the bathing process.** Give him/her some sense of control. Have him/her hold the washcloth or shampoo bottle
- **Be aware of water temperature.** Always test water for a shower or bath before the person enters to make sure it's not too hot or too cold
- **Daily baths may not be needed.** Sometimes a sponge bath will do on days between baths or showers
- **Be safe.** Use nonskid bath mats, grab bars, or shower benches to reduce the risk of falling. Also, never leave a person with Alzheimer's disease alone in the bath or shower
- **Be gentle.** Wash and dry off gently to avoid irritating his/her skin



## Toileting advice

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Another concern when caring for someone with Alzheimer's disease is bladder/bowel problems. There can be several causes for these: the person is not aware of the need to go to the bathroom; the person forgets where the bathroom is; or the person is experiencing a side effect from medication. Here are some tips that may help with toileting:

- **Remind the person that he/she may need to go.** Ask if he/she needs to go to the bathroom. Be aware of behavior, such as restlessness or pacing, that may signal a need to use the bathroom
- **Set a toileting schedule.** Keep a written record of when he/she goes to the bathroom, as well as what he/she eats and drinks, to help you figure out his/her natural toileting schedule. Use a bedside commode if he/she cannot travel to the toilet
- **Know how often he/she has a bowel movement.** A daily bowel movement is not necessary. However, if one has not occurred for several days, it could be constipation. Consider adding foods to his/her diet that are high in fiber, such as bran or whole-grain breads, or a natural laxative such as prunes
- **Provide a clear path to the bathroom.** Make it easy for the person to get to the bathroom. Remove furniture or other items that may block the way
- **Consider products to help with bladder problems.** If the person is experiencing bladder problems, consider using rubberized pads on bedding, having a bedside commode, or using adult diapers
- **Get to know the person's routine.** Knowing when the person needs to use the bathroom can help prevent accidents. For example, make sure there is a visit to the bathroom every 2 hours.
- **Avoid caffeinated drinks.** Drinks containing caffeine, such as cola, coffee, and tea, can increase the need to urinate
- **Limit the amount of liquids before bedtime.** To avoid bed-wetting, do not offer fluids 2 hours before he/she goes to bed. However, make sure he/she has enough to drink during the day

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## Communicating effectively with a person with Alzheimer's disease

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Caring for a person with Alzheimer's disease presents unique challenges. Sometimes it's difficult to know what the person is feeling, and at times it may also be hard for the person to understand what you are saying. Physical conditions and medication can also affect his/her ability to communicate.

Here are some tips for listening to a person with Alzheimer's disease:

- **Be comforting and reassuring.** Let the person know it's OK if he/she is having difficulty expressing himself/herself
- **Be patient.** Give the person enough time to speak. It's important that the person knows you're willing to listen
- **Show that you're interested.** Keep listening and maintaining eye contact
- **Try not to criticize or correct.** Listen as closely as you can in order to find meaning in what is being said. Repeat what was said if necessary
- **Offer a guess.** If you can't understand what he/she is trying to communicate, try helping with words
- **Look for the feelings behind the words.** Many times, it's how something is said rather than what is being said. His/her tone of voice and other actions may help you understand what he/she is really trying to say
- **Ask for nonverbal communication.** Encourage pointing or gesturing if speaking becomes difficult

When speaking to a person with Alzheimer's disease:

- **Use short, simple sentences.** Long sentences can be confusing. Speak concisely and try to keep to the point
- **Give 1-step instructions.** Express tasks or instructions in clear, simple steps
- **Use the person's name.** Using the person's name helps to get his/her attention



- **Speak slowly and clearly.** This will help the person better hear and understand you
- **Repeat information or questions.** It takes longer for a person with Alzheimer's disease to think about what you say or ask. Wait a moment, then repeat the sentence if needed
- **Identify objects by name.** For example, instead of saying "Here it is," you might say "Here's the book"
- **Turn a negative into a positive.** Rather than saying "Don't do that now," you might say "It's a good time to go for a walk"
- **Give him/her a choice.** Try to avoid open-ended questions. If you structure questions for a yes or no answer, or if you provide a clear choice, such as "Do you want the TV on or off?" you have a much better chance of getting a response
- **Try again later.** If you're not getting a response to a question or request, try asking the same question a little later; you may get a response
- **Use a positive, nurturing tone of voice.** Speak slowly and clearly, in a gentle and relaxed manner. Be aware of your feelings, which are often communicated through your tone of voice
- **Your body language and gestures are important.** Try to maintain eye contact and use friendly facial expressions when you speak. You can also make use of pointing, gesturing, and touching to get your point across

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## Decisions about driving

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For most people, driving symbolizes independence and mobility. But as Alzheimer's disease progresses, the ability to drive becomes impaired and creates a potential danger to the person with Alzheimer's disease and the community.

There are some warning signs that can help indicate the need for a thorough evaluation of the driving capabilities of the person with Alzheimer's disease:

- Driving too slowly
- Not observing traffic signs and signals
- Trouble understanding traffic situations and predicting changes
- Becoming easily frustrated or confused
- Getting lost
- Needing help from passengers
- Being in an incorrect position on the road or driving the wrong way down streets
- Not yielding at intersections

If you need help evaluating the driving capability of the person with Alzheimer's disease, the Association for Driver Rehabilitation Specialists (ADED) can help with a thorough assessment of driving skills and judgment. These specialists, who may be able to come to your home, will provide a comprehensive assessment of vision perception, functional ability, reaction time, and behind-the-wheel evaluation. You can reach this organization by telephone at 1-800-290-2344 or online at [www.aded.net](http://www.aded.net).