

Your Care Instructions

Alzheimer's disease is a type of dementia. It causes memory loss and affects judgment, language and behaviour. You may have trouble making decisions or may get lost in places that you used to know well. Alzheimer's disease is different than mild memory loss that occurs with aging. It is not clear what causes Alzheimer's disease, but it is the most common form of dementia in older adults.

Finding out that you have this disease is a shock. You may be afraid and worried about how the condition will change your life. Although there is no cure at this time, medicine in some cases may slow memory loss for a while. Other medicines may be able to help you sleep or cope with depression and behaviour changes.

Alzheimer's disease is different for everyone. It may take many years to develop. In some cases, people can function well for a long time. In the early stage of the disease, you can do things at home to make life easier and safer. You also can keep doing your hobbies and other activities. Many people find comfort in planning now for their future needs.

Follow-up care is a key part of your treatment and safety. Be sure to make and go to all appointments and call your doctor or nurse call line if you are having problems. It's also a good idea to know your test results and keep a list of the medicines you take.

How can you care for yourself at home?

Taking care of yourself

- If your doctor gives you medicines, take them exactly as prescribed. Call your doctor or nurse call line if you think you are having a problem with your medicine. You will get more details on the medicines your doctor prescribes.
- Eat a balanced diet. Get plenty of whole grains, fruits and vegetables every day. If you are not hungry at mealtimes, eat snacks at midmorning and in the afternoon. Try drinks such as Boost or Ensure if you are having trouble keeping your weight up.
- Stay active. Exercises such as walking may slow the decline of your mental abilities. Try to stay active mentally too. Read and work crossword puzzles if you enjoy these activities.
- If you have trouble sleeping, do not nap during the day. Get regular exercise (but not within several hours of bedtime). Drink a glass of warm milk or caffeine-free herbal tea before going to bed.

- Ask your doctor about support groups and other resources in your area. They can help people who have Alzheimer's disease and their families.
- Be patient. You may find that a task takes you longer than it used to.
- If you have not already done so, make an advance care plan. An advance care plan provides instructions to your doctor and family members about what kind of care you want if you become unable to speak or express yourself. Talk to a lawyer about making a will, if you do not already have one.

Keeping schedules

- Develop a routine. You will feel less frustrated or confused if you have a clear, simple plan of what to do every day.
 - Make lists of your medicines and when to take them.
 - Write down appointments and other tasks in a calendar.
 - Put sticky notes around the house to help you remember events and other things you have to do.
 - Schedule activities and tasks for times of the day when you are best able to handle them.

Staying safe

- Tell someone when you are going out and where you are going. Let the person know when you will be back. Before you go out alone, write down where you are going, how to get there, and how to get back home. Do this even if you have gone there many times before. Take someone along with you when possible.
- Make your home safe. Tack down rugs, put no-slip tape in the tub, use handrails, and put safety switches on stoves and appliances.
- Have a family member or other caregiver tell you whether you are driving badly. Deciding to stop driving is very hard for many people. Driving helps you feel independent. Your provincial ministry of transportation can do a driving test if there is any question. Plan for other means of getting around when you are no longer able to drive.
- Use strong lighting, especially at night. Put night-lights in bedrooms, hallways, and washrooms.
- Lower the hot water temperature setting to 50°C or lower to avoid burns.

When should you call for help?

Call 911 anytime you think you may need emergency care. For example, call if:

- You are lost and do not know whom to call.
- You are injured and do not know whom to call.

Call your doctor or nurse call line now or seek immediate medical care if:

- Your symptoms suddenly get much worse.

Watch closely for changes in your health, and be sure to contact your doctor or nurse call line if:

- You want more information about how you can take care of yourself.

For 24/7 nurse advice and general health information call Health Link at 811.

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