

ADJUSTING TO LONG-TERM CARE

Preparing for the move

The move from home or the community to a long-term care home can be made easier for both the caregiver and the person with the disease by preparing ahead of time. If appropriate, have the person visit the long-term care facility in advance so that he/she can become familiar with the new environment. Since many facilities' social activities are open to the public, you may find it helpful to attend a few functions prior to the move.

On moving day, take any items that might make the person with Alzheimer's disease or other dementias feel more comfortable. Photographs, a radio, or a favourite blanket can help to personalize a room. Seeing familiar objects may also help the person adjust to the new environment.

Take care of yourself on moving day. If you can, bring a friend along or plan to have someone at home when you return so you are not alone.

What you might be feeling

As a caregiver, you will experience a broad range of emotions once the person you have cared for has moved to a long-term care home. You may feel guilty. You may feel relieved that the responsibility of providing care is no longer solely on your shoulders. You may even experience second thoughts about your decision. These are all normal reactions.

Adjusting to the new situation

It will take time for both of you to adjust to your new situation. Keep in mind that there is no correct number of times to visit the person during this period. For some people, the demands of caregiving have been such that they need a "rest" during the

first few weeks after moving. Others will want to visit as often as possible during the first few weeks. Whatever you decide during this period is the right decision for you. Go as often as you want and stay for as long as you feel comfortable. The important thing is to make each visit – no matter the length or the frequency – as full and rewarding as possible for both of you.

The person with dementia will also need some time to adjust to the new environment. Try to be patient as he/she settles in. For some, this may take weeks or months; for others, it may be less. Communicate closely with the staff during this adjustment period.

Changes in the person with Alzheimer's disease or other dementia

Sometimes, the person with dementia adjusts quite well to the new surroundings. This may leave you with mixed emotions – while you feel happy that the person is doing so well, you may also feel slightly rejected because he/she seems more content in the facility than at home. These feelings are perfectly natural.

You have not lost your role as caregiver. You are now sharing the responsibility of care with others. There are bound to be some fundamental differences in the caregiving routine that is provided by a facility and that which you had provided at home. Remember, you were providing ongoing care at home for 24 hours a day, seven days a week, but staff are not responsible for carrying the caregiving responsibilities alone. Staff members work in shifts, sharing the responsibility of caring for a number of people with other health care professionals.

A benefit of having outside care is that you can focus your time and energy to provide the person with a sense of belonging and love that no one else can give.

Remember that Alzheimer's disease will continue to progress regardless of where the person lives. Sometimes, caregivers expect that the person with dementia will improve once he or she is under the care of staff. When this does not happen, there is disappointment. You may find that you need to continue to learn more about the disease process and care techniques. Your local Alzheimer Society can provide information and resources to help you.

Helping staff get to know the person

You can play a vital role in easing the transition from home to facility by sharing your knowledge about the person. After all, who can better explain life-long habits, likes, dislikes, favourite foods, music and hobbies than you?

Communicating appropriate information about the person's personal life, occupation and daily routines can greatly assist staff in caring for the individual.

You may also be able to pass on coping strategies that have worked for you while caring for the person. Some caregivers write this information down as a mini-biography. Others use memory books, photo albums or home-made videos. The Alzheimer Society's Personal Care Book may be useful in helping you create this personal profile.

Communicating with staff

There will be many people with whom you and the person with dementia will come into contact at the long-term care facility – health-care aides, registered nursing staff, activity staff, housekeepers and volunteers. It is often helpful to establish a primary contact person to determine who to speak to when you have questions or concerns.

Visiting

Visiting is a primary way you can stay connected, now that you are no longer providing day-to-day care. You may feel that you want to continue life-long routines and make visits around these activities, such as sharing a meal together. Visits can be more social and you can join in a group activity such as a musical event. Visits can also be more personal and you can enjoy quiet times alone reading or reminiscing. Visits from other family members, such as grandchildren, can help the person feel connected. The main objective is to make the time together as meaningful as possible.

Need more information?

Contact your local Alzheimer Society for information and support. Visit our website at www.alzheimer.ca.

Resources:

- ¹ *Guidelines for Care*, Alzheimer Society of Canada.
- ² *The Alzheimer Journey: At the Crossroads*, Alzheimer Society of Canada.
- ³ *Personal Care Book*, Alzheimer Society of Canada.

Alzheimer Society

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