

Caregiving

Back to Basics

Whether Alzheimer's Disease is a new challenge in the life of someone you love or if you are an experienced caregiver, here are 10 tips to consider for day to day care.

- 1. Get a diagnosis as early as possible.** Alzheimer symptoms may appear gradually but don't delay getting a diagnosis. The sooner you know what you're dealing with, the better you can plan for the future and manage the present.
- 2. Do legal and financial planning.** Consult an elder law attorney on such planning tools as power of attorney, a will; a living trust, guardianship.
- 3. Educate yourself on caregiving.** Alzheimer's disease has stages of progression, requiring different caregiving skills. There is a wealth of information available through the Alzheimer's Association to help you best care for your loved one.
- 4. Know what resources are available to you.** Adult day care and other respite care programs, in-home assistance, visiting nurses and Meals-on-Wheels are just some of the community services you could call on.
- 5. Get help.** Trying to do everything yourself will exhaust you. Call on the involvement and support of family and friends. A support group will allow you to learn from others and assure you that you're not alone.
- 6. Take care of yourself.** It's easy for Alzheimer's caregivers to neglect their own needs while devoting themselves totally to their loved ones. By taking advantage of available resources, you can pay more attention to yourself.
- 7. Manage your stress level.** Stress can manifest itself physically, emotionally, or behaviorally. Be alert to stress symptoms (digestive problems, depression, lack of concentration, for instance) and get help.
- 8. Learn to let go.** People are often reluctant to turn caregiving over to others. When this difficult decision must be made, contact the Chapter office for assistance in determining which facility will be best for your loved one.
- 9. Be realistic.** Until there is a treatment or cure, the progression of Alzheimer's disease is certain and inescapable. Enjoy your good memories and live for each day.
- 10. Give yourself credit, not guilt.** Do the best you can and realize you're human; you will make mistakes. Being a devoted Alzheimer's caregiver is something to be proud of.

* Although this article was written specifically for caregivers of Alzheimer's disease, the information can apply to all caregivers.