

A monthly newsletter for people caring for those affected by Alzheimer's disease or another form of dementia.

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## Providing Late-Stage Care

*This month, we're taking a look at the challenges of caring for a person in the late-stages of dementia. If you or someone you know is struggling to provide this type of care, call our 24/7 Helpline at 800.272.3900 to get support and advice.*



The late stage of Alzheimer's disease and other dementias can last anywhere from a few weeks to several years. As the disease progresses, the person will need increasingly intense care.

Caregivers are often required to provide assistance with eating and swallowing, toileting, dressing, and more. The person will also be vulnerable to infections, particularly pneumonia and urinary tract infections.

Due to the intense care that the person may need, it is a good idea to consider moving the person into a facility that can provide 24/7 care. This is an incredibly difficult choice, and it's recommended that families come together to gather information about their options. Remember that the goal is that the person with dementia receives all the care they need, regardless of where that care is administered. (To find out more about these options, visit [alz.org/careoptions](https://alz.org/careoptions).)

If your family has decided that caring for the person at home is the best option, there may be a

number of new skills you'll need to learn. Because the person with dementia cannot tend to their hygiene, that task will fall to the caregiver. Similarly, feeding, toileting, pain and medication management will need to be handled by the caregiver.

### Food and Fluids

As the person becomes less active, they will require fewer calories than before, but it is still very important to monitor their food intake. Adding sugar to food and serving their favorite meals will help to increase their appetite, which may be dwindling. If the person is losing weight, consult their doctor; they may recommend supplements between meals. Here are some more tips to help with food intake:

- **Make sure the person is in a comfortable, upright position.** To aid digestion, keep the person upright for at least 30 minutes after eating.
- **Adapt food if swallowing is a problem.** Choose soft foods that can be chewed and swallowed

*Continued on next page*

easily. Thicken liquids with cornstarch or unflavored gelatin, or purchase thickened liquids at your local pharmacy.

- **Assist the person with feeding, if needed.** Remind the person to chew and swallow each bite before going in for the next.

### Bowel and Bladder Function

Incontinence and other difficulties with toileting is very common at this stage of dementia. To maintain bowel and bladder health:

- **Set a toileting schedule.** Make a note when the person uses the toilet so that you can develop a schedule that fits their natural routine. If the person is no longer able to walk to the bathroom, use a bedside commode. You can also use adult disposable briefs and absorbent pads, but be sure to change them frequently.
- **Limit liquids before bedtime.** Starting two hours before bedtime, limit - but do not eliminate - fluid intake.
- **Monitor bowel movements.** If three consecutive days pass without a bowel movement, the person may be constipated. Add natural laxatives into their diet, such as high-fiber foods and liquids.

### Skin and Body Health

If the person is no longer able to move from their bed or chair, they are at risk for pressure sores and “freezing” joints. To keep the person’s skin and joints healthy:

- **Relieve body pressure and improve circulation.** Change the person's position at least every two hours to relieve pressure. Make sure the person is comfortable, and pay extra attention to bony areas such as the elbows, hips, and heels.
- **Learn how to safely lift the person.** A care provider (nurse, home health aide, or physical therapist) can provide instructions on how to properly lift the person without injury.
- **Keep their skin clean and dry.** Use gentle motions and avoid friction to prevent bruising or tearing of the skin. Wash only with mild soap, blot dry, and check daily for rashes, sores or breakdowns.

- **Prevent “freezing” of joints.** Joint “freezing” (limb contractures) can occur when a person is confined to their bed or a chair. Speak to the person’s doctor to see if range of motion exercises is appropriate.

### Infections and Pneumonia

People in the late stages of dementia are particularly vulnerable to infections. As their caregiver, it’s important to closely monitor their health to make sure they are not in pain.

- **Keep the teeth and mouth clean.** Good oral hygiene reduces the risk of pneumonia and other infections. Use a soft toothbrush or moistened gauze to clean the gums, tongue, and other soft mouth tissues. If the person wears dentures, be sure to clean them daily.
- **Treat cuts and scrapes immediately.** Clean the wound with soapy water and apply an antibiotic ointment. Seek medical help if the cut is deep or does not heal in a reasonable amount of time.
- **Protect against the flu, COVID-19, and other respiratory viruses.** Get the flu shot each year, and consider having the person vaccinated against pneumococcal pneumonia.
- **Watch for signs of pain.** Nonverbal signals of pain can include gestures, facial expressions, and changes in behavior. Physical signs include pale or flushed skin tone; dry, pale gums; mouth sores; vomiting; feverish skin; or swelling of any part of the body.

ADVANCING THE SCIENCE:  
THE LATEST IN ALZHEIMER’S AND  
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*You are cordially invited*

**Santa Barbara North County  
Community Research Reception**

Wednesday, March 15, 2023 | 5:30-7PM  
Santa Maria Wisdom Center

**Register at [bit.ly/crrsbnorth](https://bit.ly/crrsbnorth)**  
Questions? Contact [Imleonard@alz.org](mailto:Imleonard@alz.org)

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