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Making the Decision

When is the right time for facility care?

It is difficult to know when to begin looking for facility care for a loved one. However, if you are the primary care provider for someone with Alzheimer's disease, you may begin asking this question as the disease progresses. The most important thing to remember is that there is no "right" time for everyone. Each person and family is different, and there are several factors to consider. To discuss these factors, a family meeting is recommended, including family, close friends and neighbors, and -- when possible -- the person with Alzheimer's. Use the checklist below to assess your caregiving situation.

What are the important issues?

- ◆ Safety
- ◆ Personal Hygiene
- ◆ Behavioral Concerns
- ◆ Nutrition
- ◆ Time and Energy
- ◆ Financial Concerns
- ◆ Caregiver Issues
- ◆ In-home Options

Safety

Does your loved one forget or refuse to use safety equipment such as wheelchairs, walkers, or grab bars?

Is the home environment becoming more difficult for the person with AD? (e.g., stairs, accessible doors, dark hallways)

Has your loved one had accidents with the stove, appliances, or other household items?

Has the person with AD had trouble getting around the house without falls or extensive help walking?

If your loved one smokes, has he/she had smoking accidents? (e.g., forgetting to extinguish cigarette, burning holes in clothing)

Personal Hygiene

Is it difficult for your loved one to get to the bathroom when needed?

Is the person with AD unwilling or unable to bathe?

Is the person with AD unwilling or unable to change clothing when needed?

Is your loved one unable or unwilling to help with personal care tasks?

Have care needs for your loved one become too difficult or too demanding for you?

Behavioral Concerns

Has your loved one ever wandered away from home or been lost?

Is your loved one combative, suspicious, angry, or refusing care?

Has the person with AD physically harmed himself or you at any time in the past?

Nutrition

Does the person with AD have trouble preparing meals or eating independently?

Do you have difficulty encouraging your loved one to eat appropriate, nutritious foods?

Is your loved one having health problems associated with poor nutrition? (e.g., vitamin deficiency, dehydration, weight loss, illness)

Has eating and swallowing become difficult for the person with AD?

Time and Energy

Does your loved one need help with most Activities of Daily Living (ADLs)? (e.g., eating, bathing, dressing, personal hygiene)

Do housekeeping duties need to be done so frequently that care becomes an excessive demand?

Have you frequently lost sleep at night due to caregiving?

Financial Concerns

Would/Do you have difficulty affording in-home help 24 hours a day?

Have the financial strains of caregiving been difficult on your personal budget? (e.g., medical equipment, incontinence, food)

Do you miss work frequently due to caregiver responsibilities?

Caregiver Issues

At the end of the day, do you feel like you just can't make it through another day? Is this a recurrent thought?

Is your health at risk or beginning to suffer because of your caregiving responsibilities?

Have you lost privacy or the ability to organize and run your household?

Is there frequent conflict between household members related to caregiving issues?

When you get a break from caregiving, do you still feel overwhelmed and exhausted?

In-home Care

Have you tried and been unsuccessful with in-home services such as housekeeping, delivered meals, personal and companion care?

Have you had difficulty getting your loved one to attend adult day programs?

Has overnight respite care been used?

Have you had difficulty enlisting the assistance of family and friends to give yourself a break?

If you answered "yes" to many of these questions, you may need to begin thinking about alternative care options. These are just some of the factors to consider when making this difficult decision. Individual personalities, family history, and outside support should always be a part of your decision.