

The Comfort of Home™

# Alzheimer's Care—A Day at A Time

“CARING FOR YOU... CARING FOR OTHERS”

## Hallucinations - Practical Steps That Help

People with Alzheimer's or dementia sometimes see and hear things that are not really there. For example, a dark colored rug in the center of the room can look like a hole in the floor to someone who has hallucinations.

Here are some steps to take to make the person's home or room more comfortable for him.

- ❁ Light, solid colors are ideal. Complicated patterns can cause confusion.
- ❁ Keep the room well-lit to avoid shadows that may confuse.
- ❁ Remove or cover mirrors. A person with Alzheimer's can be frightened by reflections.
- ❁ Keep the home neat and the furniture in the same place. Avoid changes.

### Note

A person who has hallucinations should be evaluated by a medical professional. Sometimes medication is needed.

When someone is behaving aggressively or having hallucinations, do not confront or argue with him. Stay calm, and make sure that you have an easy exit if he is out of control.

For more resources go to: Alzheimer's Disease Education & Referral Center, A Service of the National Institute on Aging. Home Safety for People with Alzheimer's; [www.alzheimer's.org](http://www.alzheimer's.org)

## Building Self Esteem

### Recall important roles

Help the person in your care feel pride and joy by reminding him or her of meaningful times in their lives. If she held an important job, introduce her by saying, *“This is Mary. Mary was a librarian for twenty years.”*



If the person is a veteran and had pride in his service, say, *“Bob served our country as a pilot for two years during the war.”* Or for someone who raised a family, say, *“John, we're so proud that your grandson finished college this year!”* The person's self esteem is boosted when you mention his accomplishments.

### Activity Ideas

What does he or she like to do?

The person in your care can take comfort in activities that he once enjoyed.

For example, if he:

- ❖ Loved automobiles. . . visit a car show or showroom
- ❖ Loves the outdoors. . . take a trip to a local lake, beach or park for a picnic
- ❖ Enjoys animals. . . visit a local pet store or animal adoption center
- ❖ Loves children. . . watch an after-school ball game at a local park or school
- ❖ Likes crafts . . . bring a watercolor set and paint a scene from the room
- ❖ Enjoys movies . . . rent or go to fun movies. Include others for company.



### COMMUNICATING

#### Offer Choices

A person with dementia can be confused and frustrated by questions that require her to recall experiences, such as “*What did you do yesterday?*” Instead, ask a question in a way that helps the person remember the event. For example, “*Did you enjoy having lunch with your friend Emma yesterday?*”



### Being Flexible Helps

As a person’s dementia develops, he might become increasingly resistant to some usual activities. One caregiver author explained that her husband, who was battling a rare genetic disorder that caused dementia-like behavior, refused to go to church anymore. She decided that it was easier to take him to the zoo or the beach than to force him to go to church. Where can you be flexible?

Source: Kay Marshall Strom, *A Caregiver's Survival Guide: How to Stay Healthy When Your Loved One is Sick*, 2000 (Intervarsity Press, PO Box 1400, Downers Grove, IL 60515) ISBN: 0-830802230-5, paperback, 153 pp., \$10.



### Help for You

*Especially in later stage dementia, it is not a good idea to leave the person in your care alone. Keep a list of emergency phone numbers of people you can call on short notice if you need to step out.*

#### Back-up Help

Relative: \_\_\_\_\_

Friend: \_\_\_\_\_

Neighbor: \_\_\_\_\_

Home Care Agency: \_\_\_\_\_

Senior Center: \_\_\_\_\_





## Coping with Resistance

A person with dementia can feel confused by simple tasks. When the person in your care is refusing to cooperate, you can try to do the following:

- ❁ Identify what may be causing the confusion. It could be over-stimulation, fear, or misunderstanding.
- ❁ Ask yourself if the task can be put off until he is calmer.
- ❁ Speak in soothing tones, without shouting or arguing.
- ❁ Help him feel in control by offering him choices. Instead of saying, “*You need to get dressed,*” ask, “*Would you like to wear the blue shirt or the brown shirt today?*”

### Tips on Handling Difficult Situations

Behavior	Possible Cause	Solutions
Refuses to bathe	Fear of water; modesty about undressing; disorientation; lack of patience; cold or discomfort	Allow him or her to undress behind a towel; keep a calm voice; keep bathroom warm; give a sponge bath when fear of water is overwhelming
Refuses to take medication	Confusion about swallowing; paranoia about medication	Calmly explain that the medication is to help her; try offering the medicine with a favorite food; wait ten minutes until she is calmer; distract her with interesting talk
Refuses to get in the car	General upset; confusion about how to enter car; fear of going somewhere	Rest for a few minutes next to the car and distract by talking about something else; Give simple instructions, such as “ <i>put your hand on this handle</i> ”; Make the destination sound fun
Refuses to dress	Confusion	Avoid patterned or “busy” clothing; use elastic waist pants instead of belts; use slip-on shoes instead of lace-ups; use Velcro or zippered jackets instead of buttons

RECIPIENT'S NAME  
RECIPIENT'S ADDRESS  
CITY, STATE, ZIP CODE

YOUR ORGANIZATION'S NAME  
YOUR ORGANIZATION'S ADDRESS  
CITY, STATE, ZIP CODE

PLACE  
POSTAGE  
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Put your organization's announcements below or leave the article

## Safe Driving

**Question:** My dad doesn't drive safely anymore. But he refuses to stop driving. What can I do?

**Answer:** Have a trusted doctor check his vision and reflexes. Confidentially ask the physician for a letter stating that he should no longer be driving. Send the letter to the DMV requesting that his license be taken away. This process may take several weeks.

If the situation is critical, contact a supervisor at the DMV immediately. Tell your father that someone reported him driving erratically, and that you'll have to take him in for a "routine" eye exam right away. If the DMV ends up taking the license away, be sympathetic, saying how sorry you are that this has happened. This way, you're not the horrible person who took his last pleasure in life away.

Transportation for seniors is inexpensive and available in many areas, and will help prevent him from feeling trapped at home. Take the car keys away, but if you fear that he may still try to drive, put "The Club" on the steering wheel. Also, you can remove the distributor cap or have a notch put in the car keys so the car won't work.

Source: Jacqueline Marcell, *Elder Rage, or Take My Father... Please! How to Survive Caring for Aging Parents* (Impressive Press, 25 Via Lucca, Suite J-333, Irvine, California 92612-0604, 949-975-1012, www.elderrage.com) ISBN: 0-9679703-1-8, paperback, 368 pp., \$19.95.



### Our Purpose

To provide caregivers with critical information enabling them to do their job with confidence, pride and competence.

### Ordering Info

*The Comfort of Home™ Alzheimer's Care-A Day at A Time* is published 10 times per year. Additional language versions may be available on request.

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