

SHARED EXPERIENCES

Suggestions for living well with Alzheimer's disease



Continuing to care for myself

Alzheimer's disease research

Several medications are now available to treat some symptoms of Alzheimer's disease. These medications can slow down the decline in memory, language and thinking abilities. The treatments work for some people. These drugs are not a cure for the disease. They do not stop its progression. Ask your doctor what is available and if there is a treatment suitable for you.

Experimental drugs and therapies

Other drugs and therapies are also being tested for the treatment of the symptoms of Alzheimer's disease. Your local Alzheimer Society should have information on clinical drug trials and other research taking place in your area. Clinical trials study the safety and effectiveness of new drugs or treatments by testing them on people who volunteer to participate in the studies.

What is happening in Alzheimer's disease research?

Scientists in Canada and around the world are working hard to figure out the causes of Alzheimer's disease so they can develop effective treatments and, ultimately, a cure. Among other things, they are investigating ways to:

- Replace lost nerve cells with cells from bone marrow
- Develop a vaccine to prevent the build up of toxic plaques in the brain
- See if non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs can prevent or delay Alzheimer's disease by decreasing inflammation in the brain

Researchers are also trying to understand the psychological and social effects of the disease on individuals and families.

We do not know what the next major research breakthrough will be or how soon it will happen. But there is optimism for major successes in Alzheimer's disease research, if not for the people who have already been diagnosed, then for their children and the next generation.

Participation in research

If you are interested in participating in research, your local Alzheimer Society can give you information on some things to consider. Research participation is also something to discuss with the family members who will be closely involved in your care, since they are the ones who may have to weigh the risks and benefits of your continued participation in research as you progress through the disease.

Healthy living

There is no way to stop the progression of Alzheimer's disease. There are, however, many things you can do to maintain a healthy lifestyle. Eating a well-balanced, nutritious diet is extremely beneficial and provides the fuel and nutrients that our bodies need to function efficiently, maintain general health and provide energy.

Physical activity can help you feel better, reduce stress and maintain health. Choose physical activities that you enjoy and make them part of your daily routine. Ask your doctor what types of activities you can do to keep active.

Stay connected

It is easy to become isolated and lonely when living with Alzheimer's disease. Stay connected with family and friends. Finding opportunities to interact with the people around you will help you stay engaged. Talking to someone you trust about your feelings, your hopes and worries or simply sharing a good laugh can provide the support and encouragement you need.

Meaningful activities

Things that were important and meaningful for you throughout your life will still continue to be. If you enjoyed cooking, gardening, fishing or sports, continue making them a part of your everyday routine. You can also take pleasure in living in the moment, appreciating the small joys of life, such as seeing flowers coming into bloom, watching birds at a feeder and pushing a child in a swing. Capture these moments and enjoy them.

Visit your physician

See your doctor regularly for check-ups and to address specific health concerns. Take your medications as prescribed.

Safety

The gradual loss of memory and the difficulties with decision-making and communication often raise concerns over safety. The following are a few suggestions to keep you safe, especially if you live alone.

- Contact your local Alzheimer Society for resources available in your community.
- Talk to your doctor about getting assistance in the home with things like housekeeping, meal preparation, transportation, etc.

- Some banks have “bank at home” services that may be helpful. If yours does not, let the bank manager know you have Alzheimer’s disease and that you have difficulty keeping track of your banking. He or she can help you.
- Arrange for direct deposit of cheques such as Old Age Pension or Canada or Quebec Pension to your account.
- Meals on Wheels can ensure a good meal is delivered to your home once a day. Fresh fruit and vegetable baskets and frozen meals are also often available.
- Have a family member sort out your closet and dresser drawers to make it easier for you to choose what to wear.
- Leave a set of house keys with a neighbour you trust.
- Use a toaster oven or microwave, if you are familiar with using one, rather than the stove.
- Leave written reminders to yourself like “turn off the stove” or “unplug the iron.” Make sure they are placed where you will see them often.
- Have family or friends arrange for a daily call-in or visit. Some communities have a service that will do this.
- Talk with someone about sorting and securing items that could be mistaken for something else (e.g. cleaning fluids could be mistaken for something to drink, or nail polish can be mistaken for eye drops).

Staying alone

The person you live with may worry about leaving you alone for a long period of time. While you may feel you will be fine alone, having a companion may help the time pass more pleasantly and decrease the worry for everyone.

Electrical appliances

If there are certain appliances you use frequently, you may want to ensure they all have automatic shut-offs.

Smoke detectors

Every home should have a smoke detector on each level. Ensure that your home does. A smoke detector could save your life in case of fire.

Dealing with people you do not recognize

If someone comes to your door that you do not recognize, ask for their name and telephone number instead of letting them in. You or your family member can call them back later.

Additional resources

For more information on treatment options, maintaining health and wellness, and safety, please refer to the following print materials. These are available from the Alzheimer Society or visit on-line at www.alzheimer.ca.

- *How drugs are approved in Canada* (includes checklist for participating in clinical trials)
- *Treatment options*
- *Long-term care*
- *Living alone*
- *Driving*
- *Heads up for healthier brains*
- *Safety*
- *Locating devices*
- *By Us For Us (BUFU) Guides* - created by people with dementia and/or caregivers - *Enhancing Wellness* and *Memory Workout*