

Long-Distance Caregiving

In today's world, many families are geographically spread apart. And we are not always able to provide the hands-on care we would like. While living at a distance can complicate caregiving, there are resources to help.



Quick tips and resources

Taking care of concerns, such as a family member's safety, nutrition and health, can be difficult when you live in another city, state or country. But getting organized and being prepared can go a long way in helping coordinate care from a distance.

- **Identify resources and use them.**
Learn about what is available in your community by contacting your local Alzheimer's Association at 1.800.272.3900 or using our online Community Resource Finder. You can also use Alzheimer's Navigator, our free online tool that helps evaluate your needs, identify action steps and connect with local programs and services.
- **Reassess care needs during each visit.**
Dementia is a progressive disease, and care will need to be adjusted over time. While someone in early-stage Alzheimer's may live independently, by the middle stage, 24-hour supervision will be required. Each time you visit, assess the situation to make sure care needs are being met.
- **Keep communication going.**
As a long-distance caregiver, you may coordinate many moving parts. Whether it is with family, neighbors or home health aides, set aside time to regularly discuss the needs of the person with dementia. If the person with dementia lives at a residential care facility, set up a regular time with the managing nurse or physician to get updates, and maintain ongoing communication with care staff and friends who visit regularly.
- **Gather pertinent information and keep it handy.**
Make sure you have contact information for physicians, pharmacies, care providers and neighbors, as well as important financial and legal documents easily accessible in case they are unexpectedly needed.
- **Be kind to yourself.**
Living out of town does not mean you aren't involved or that you don't care. Get support by connecting with others who are long-distance caregivers through our online community.

Assessing care needs

Early-stage care

If the person with dementia is in the early stages of Alzheimer's and lives independently, you will need to reassess care needs at each visit.

Ask yourself:

- Is there food in the refrigerator? Is it spoiled? Is the person eating regular meals?
- What is the condition of the inside and the outside of the home? Has it changed?
- Are the bills paid? Are there piles of unopened mail?
- Do friends and relatives visit regularly?
- What is the person's personal appearance? Is the person bathing and grooming?
- Is the person still able to drive safely?

Middle-stage and late-stage care

Early in the middle stages, it will become too difficult or dangerous for a person with Alzheimer's to be left alone. The person will need supervision around the clock. During the late-stages, around-the-clock care needs will become more intensive. There are several care options, including having a caregiver provide care in the home, moving the person into the home of a relative, or moving the person to a residential care facility.

Regardless of which care arrangement you use, periodically assess the situation to make sure the needs of the person with dementia are being met.

Ask yourself:

- Is the person getting the help he or she needs with daily personal care, such as dressing, bathing and grooming?
- Have safety precautions been taken throughout the living environment? Do additional precautions need to be taken?
- Does the person have safe transportation to doctor's appointments and other events?
- Is the person engaged in meaningful activities during the day?

Moving the person into your own home

If you are considering moving the person into your home, here are some things to think about:

- Does he or she want to move? What about his or her spouse?
- Is your home adapted to support the person?
- Will someone be at home to care for the person?
- How does the rest of the family feel about the move?
- How will this move affect your job, family and finances?
- What respite services are available in your community to assist you?
- How will providing direct care for a person with dementia impact your own health?

Moving a person with Alzheimer's disease from familiar surroundings may cause increased agitation and confusion. Make sure to talk with your loved one's physician or a social worker and call the Alzheimer's Association for assistance before making a decision.

Coordinating care

Sometimes it takes a village. Building a list of contacts and local resources is vital when coordinating care from a distance. Having trusted eyes close at hand is also essential to make sure care needs are being met.

- **Family, friends and neighbors**
Make a list of phone numbers and addresses. Ask if you can check in with them to find out how your family member is doing. They may be willing to stop by your loved one's home for regular visits.



- **Use our free online calendar.** Our Care Team Calendar helps you coordinate when friends, family and neighbors can help out with caregiving.

- **The doctor**
Keep in contact with the physician overseeing care, and make sure he or she has your contact information in case there are concerns about your family member's mental or physical well-being. Have the person with dementia sign a release of information so the doctor is free to communicate with you.

- **Community organizations**
Check with local churches, temples, neighborhood groups and volunteer organizations. They may provide meal delivery, transportation or companion services.

- **Aging agencies**
You may be able to access services to help with meals, chores and transportation through your local area agency on aging. To locate your area agency, call the Eldercare Locator toll-free at 1.800.677.1116 or visit the Eldercare Locator website.

- **Home care services**
Home health care workers can help the person with bathing, personal care activities, preparing meals and taking medications. Learn more.

- **Geriatric care managers**
These elder care experts specialize in assessing and monitoring the needs of the elderly. To find out more about their services, visit the Association of Professional Geriatric Care Managers website or call 520.881.8008.

- **Trusted professionals**
Elder law attorneys work with older clients and their families to get legal documents in place for making health care, legal and financial decisions. Learn more.

Making the most of visits

Few long-distance caregivers are able to spend as much time with their loved one as they would like. The key is to use your time effectively:

- Make appointments with your loved one's physician, lawyer and financial adviser during your visit to participate in decision-making.

- Meet with neighbors, friends and other relatives to hear how they think the person is doing. Ask if there have been any behavioral changes, health problems or safety issues.

- Take time to reconnect with your loved one by talking, listening to music, going for a walk or participating in activities you enjoy together.
- Check the person's cupboards and refrigerator to make sure there is enough appropriate food.
- Review medications to make sure they are being taken as prescribed.

Read more: <http://www.alz.org/care/alzheimers-dementia-long-distance-caregiving.asp#ixzz2t20Stw29>