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Making Homes Safe for Those Who Suffer From Alzheimer's Disease

By Linda Fodrini-Johnson



Linda Fodrini-Johnson, MA, MFT, CMC is a Licensed Family Therapist and Certified Care Manager. She is the Founder of Eldercare Services, a full-service care management and home care company doing business since 1989. Linda's new e-book "7 Steps to a Healthy Life for You and Your aging Parents" can be found on Amazon.com.

or spouse:

1. Remove all sharp knives and scissors from eyesight. You might need to take the knobs off the stove and only put them on when you are cooking.
2. Medications should be kept in a locked cabinet and given only as directed by the primary caregiver.
3. Showers need to be adjusted for temperature before the person steps in. Often using a shower seat and a hand held shower wand is preferred for safety. A Care Manager can help you create a safe way to bathe your family member.
4. Wandering can be a big problem with dementia. Early on provide your family member with the Alzheimer's Association bracelet. GPS devices are becoming more frequently used - the Alzheimer's

Having a dementia like Alzheimer's puts more people at risk when living alone or living with a family member. Early in this journey, often the only risk is forgetting an appointment or maybe taking the trash out on the right night. But, as this disease progresses, risks start to increase from forgetting to take important medications, to remembering how to use appliances including garden equipment safely or cooking appliances that could cause a fire.

For those living alone, the following tips can help reduce some of the risks associated with loss of memory, sequencing, and judgment:

1. Using technology that notifies you when someone leaves the home, uses kitchen appliances, uses the bathroom, and takes medications can be very helpful in the early stages of dementia. Technology can also let you know if they are doing the "normal activities of daily living" with timely alerts.
2. Early on in the process you might want to remove from the home ladders, garden equipment, poisons used in and around the home and maybe even some dangerous tools.
3. Having meals delivered prevents accidents while cooking. A main meal that is provided for lunch allows for more finger foods in the evenings. Monitoring the refrigerator is good at this stage - it lets you know if they are still getting good nutrition.

Some more tips for those living with a companion

Association has a store for these items on their website.

5. Black mats in front of doors sometimes turn people away from the door - they see the mat as a hole in the floor. Delay egress systems with a buzzer can alert you to those coming and going. Some families have put signs on the back of doors that say "this is not an exit," and that can deter escaping.

6. Driving is an issue that can come up earlier in the disease due to disorientation, reaction times, and the likelihood of getting lost or being involved in an accident. If driving is an issue, we have an excellent booklet from the Hartford Insurance Company - call our office for that information or a copy of the booklet.

The other major issue on keeping those with dementia safe is to provide activities that keep them engaged without frustrating their abilities. Daycare programs are a good solution providing activities and giving family respite, as is having a personal assistant trained in dementia care activities.

Reach the reporter at: info@lamorindaweekly.com

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